

CONTEXTUALIZATION OF PREACHING
IN THE TONGAN-AMERICAN CONGREGATION

A Professional Project

Presented to
the Faculty of
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In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry

by
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has been presented to and accepted by the
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ABSTRACT

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In the Tongan context, the concept of contextualization has been explored in the theology of worship, missiology, and church, but there is an absence of literature that reflects a theology of preaching. However, Tongan preachers aware of the Western influence on Christian proclamation and practice have worked to shape the Gospel message in ways that reflect Tongan culture. This project was designed for the Tongan American congregation of Sun Valley United Methodist in an effort to explore the most effective way to communicate the gospel that brings meaningful life to the Tongan American congregation.

In order to accomplish the goal of contextualization in preaching, this project begins with library research that deals with Tongan cultural practices, history of Christianity in Tonga, and Tongan-American Christianity as practiced by those who migrated and started the Sun Valley United Methodist Church. The task of contextualization of preaching is examined by engaging the theological and homiletical writings of various scholars, and a few Tongan theologians that are most familiar with the subject. The project also includes sermons that were designed to reflect Tongan culture followed by an analysis of these contextual sermons in terms of methods and effectiveness for proclamation. The project also draws on the findings of two surveys, one given mainly to clergy who work in Tongan-American contexts and the other given to members of the Sun Valley Church. Finally, the project reviews the findings and offers a few suggestions for contextualizing preaching in Tongan American congregations.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Although Tongan people have shared proudly their Christian heritage as a religious people or "*kakai lotu*," and believed the Tongan culture or "*anga fakatonga*" is harmonized with the Christian teachings, the social, cultural, and religious practices of the Tongan American congregation of Sun Valley United Methodist Church reflect their faith as shaped in Tongan culture and create many stumbling blocks in the practice of ministry, the understanding the Bible, and the preaching of gospel in the Tongan American Congregational context.

Importance of the Problem

Many Tongans migrated to the United States of America to improve their lives. However, the Tongan culture continues to motivate and deepen their faith, behavior, and the way they live. The Tongan American congregation of Sun Valley United Methodist Church has been serving the Tongan community for almost three decades and has become the most important part of many Tongan immigrants' lives. The lives of many Tongans revolve around the church through worship, fellowship, spirituality and by practicing their faith and culture. The church is where Tongan immigrants want to worship in the style to which they have been accustomed in Tonga. At Sun Valley United Methodist Church 80% of the members fully understand Tongan culture and speak the Tongan language. They practice their faith in the Tongan cultures or *anga fakatonga* that make them feel at home in a foreign land. In fact, the church has become the place where first generation Tongan Americans experienced the Tongan cultures through worship, sharing and fellowship as a community and expresses their love for God in a Tongan

context. Helen Morton Lee observes in her book, *Tongans Overseas: Between Two Shores* that Tongan churches were established overseas to provide a “sense of community” to cope with the Tongan migration.¹ The Tongans primarily attending churches to continue their traditional ways of worship, sing the Tongan hymns, and learn the Bible in the Tongan language. After leading and serving the church for seven years, I have recognized a tension in the spiritual lives of many Tongans. The routine of programs and Tongans traditional ways of worship in the Tongan American congregations could be demanding and be stressful. Both in their religious and social cultural activities, they seem to manifest their beliefs more through their Tongan culture rather than through the lens of the Gospel and Christian teachings. For instance, the Tongan American congregations can demand people’s money not only for ministry of the church but other fund-raising purposes in the church. At the same time, the church expected every member to attend and participate in all programs and activities as part of the Tongan’s culture. However, the church can help Tongans to experience a sense of belonging as they practice their culture and speak their language in a foreign land.

As a preacher, it is difficult to preach to a congregation that is a custodian of Tongan cultural and religious traditions in America such as Sun Valley United Methodist Church. In fact, when the missionaries from London brought Christianity to Tonga, it was recorded that they were frustrated because they lacked much understanding of the Tongan cultural context. Sione Latukefu writes,

The lack of proper training and adequate preparation was a great handicap to Thomas and Hutchinson, as it was to their predecessor, Lawry. Their inability to understand the Tongan language caused

¹Helen Morton Lee, *Tongans Overseas: Between Two Shores* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2003), 43.

much frustration in their relationship with the people.²

Although missionaries were trying to teach the Tongan people about the Bible, it remained a concern because the gospel was not in the Tongan context. Reverend John Thomas admitted to his lack of ability to preach the gospel in the Tongan context which allowed the Tongan people to continue worshipping their gods. He reported,

but we have neither skill nor means for this, and therefore in most cases, cannot undertake anything of the kind, lest we should do harm to the cause of Christ, by raising the expectation of the people, when we cannot satisfy them. We are obliged to therefore tell them that we did not come to cure their bodies but their souls, and our God saves not from pain and bodily afflictions but sin and hell, but it (gospel) is new to them and most of them care nothing about it, but wish to be made well here, they are prevailed upon to cling to their own Otuas (gods) and follow the Tongan ways.³

The missionaries felt frustrated because the Tongans seemed to hold on to their belief and practiced the Tongan ritual for healing rather than the power of the gospel. Eventually, despite of this, Tongans became Christians in 1826. In June 1829, Nathaniel Turner wrote, "I would just observe that if the conversion . . . of these islanders be our object, then we must have the Scriptures . . . brought into their language"⁴ Mr. Turner was referring to the beginning of the translations of the Holy Bible into the Tongan language in the same year. Latukefu wrote, "Four months later, the Bible was translated into the Tongan language and schools were established for the people to learn how to read the Bible."⁵ In light of this, however the Tongan people continued to practice their superstitious beliefs and old religions while trying to understand the new religion that was introduced. It was impossible for the Tongan people to ignore the Tongan traditions

² Sione Latukefu, *Church and State in Tonga* (Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1974), 45.

³ Latukefu, 1.

⁴ Latukefu, 54.

⁵ Latukefu, 54.

but harmonized them with the Bible as great assets to their understanding of God and a new religion. Hence, the continuation of this harmony of Tongan cultures and Christian teachings must be achieved by the contextualization of preaching the Bible in order to bring hope and liberation for the Tongan American church in America. In fact, the contextualization of preaching helps Tongan American congregations to understand the Gospel in a more meaningful way. Moreover, the contextualization of preaching is the effective method that could be used by preachers to communicate the gospel in the Tongan American congregation whose lifestyles and faith adhere to their heritage and culture. In the Tongan American congregation, the preacher must preach the gospel in the context of the Tongan people and translate the Gospel into the cultural structures of the people, and challenge them to live in Christ.

The church is a big part of the Tongan community. They identify with it as a home where one belongs and is a part of the Tongan way of life and culture. Tongan people's lives revolve around the church but their faith does not seem to be a defining factor in many of the lifestyle choices and practices in the church. As a result, the Tongan churches have become a burden for the people rather than a place of hope and liberation. The practices of tithing or *misinale* for the Tongan American churches provide the opportunity for people to live out their traditions and participate in their culture instead of responding to the proclamation of the Gospel by faithfully managing and exercising responsibility for God's gifts received. Jesus explains to his disciples that giving comes from the heart rather than from material wealth (Mark 12:44). However, the Tongan American congregation appreciates the honoring of the Tongan traditional way of *misinale* and is unwilling let go of such practices of stewardship. For the Tongan, the

religiocultural ways of giving demands people to give instead of inspiring them to give. At the same time, concern is frequently expressed about the impact of the Tongan church whose members commit a great deal of time to the church, leaving their children alone and not spending much time with family. A survey conducted among pastors of Tongan American churches in the California-Pacific Conference of the United Methodist Church shows that a majority of Tongan churches have several activities throughout the week that members are expected to attend (see Appendix A).

Another problem in the Tongan church is the existence of rank and power and a hierarchical system adopted by its members. According to people's status in the culture, they are given honor and respect in different degrees. For example, the seating arrangement in the church distinguishes the royal and the chief from the commoners or rest of the church members. This social obligation can be very difficult and degrading both socially and spiritually and can also become an obstacle for the community of faith in distinguishing between their culture and the gospel. One of the questions asked in the survey if the church still recognized the monarchy and the chiefs in church activities and preaching and 100% responded, "Yes," (Appendix A). Although my faith has been rooted in the Gospel, and I grew up as a 1.5 Tongan American, I have experienced difficulty in accepting this tradition in the Tongan American Congregation while trying to preach and live the Gospel. Leonora Tubbs Tisdale explained this feeling as a form of culture shock: when the pastor's own culture is different from the setting of the pastor's ministry.⁶ Therefore, this research is intended to assist those who will preach in the Tongan American congregation through preaching the Gospel in the context of the

⁶ Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 2.

Tongan people so they understand the gospel in a more meaningful way. Moreover, it is hoped that this thesis will give the Tongan people a better understanding of the gospel as the motivation for their spiritual growth and relationship with God. The gospel is a gift of God to all people, therefore, the Gospel needs to become local and indigenized and contextualized for the Tongan people as well. According to Sione 'Amanaki Havea, "Theology is a gift of God. It is God's revelation to history and culture; therefore it is an effort to interpret and to see with Pacific eyes, and to listen with Pacific ears. Then, instead of being foreign, it should become local and indigenized and contextualized."⁷

Thesis

This project seeks to contextualize preaching by drawing on Tongan cultural and spiritual traditions in designing a series of sermons for the Tongan American congregation of Sun Valley United Methodist Church, so that they may appreciate and also differentiate between Christian teaching and Tongan practices.

Definitions of Major Terms

Anga Fakatonga: The Tongan way of life or Tongan cultures or customs.

Fa'ai kavei koula: the four golden strands that explained the Tongan way of life or Tongan cultures in the relationship between the monarchy, chief and the commoners.

First generation Tongan-American: This term refers to Tongans born in Tonga who have lived in Tonga before moving to America as an adult. Regardless of how long they have lived in America. They are most comfortable with the Tongan language and the Tongan culture.

⁷Consultation on Pacific Theology, *South Pacific Theology: Papers from the Consultation on Pacific Theology, Papua New Guinea, January 1986*. Foreword by Sione 'Amanaki Havea (Paramatta, N.S.W., Australia: World Vision International South Pacific, 1987), 11.

1.5 generation Tongan-American: The Tongans born in Tonga and came to the United States as adolescence. They speak both the Tongan and English languages and practice the cultures of both places. They are also comfortable with the Tongan and American lifestyle. This group of people usually experience confusion with their identity as to whether they are American or Tongan.

Second generation Tongan-American: The United States-born Tongans of Tongan parents who grew up in the American culture and speak only English with little understanding of the Tongan language and the Tongan culture.

Inasi: The love offering or gift offerings by the commoners or Tongan people to the monarchy and the chiefs with respect and honor for their title and identity.

Lotu: In this project, the term Lotu has different meanings depending on how the word is used in the sentence. Lotu could mean Christianity, worship or prayers.

Lotu Taauma 'u: Consists of Biblical passages put together to be read with a responsive reading and concluded with the Lord's Prayer.

Misinale: in the Tongan context, it is the congregation's annual collection or tithe to the church

Tongan American Congregations (TAC): In this project, the term refers to the Tongan American congregations that consist of Tongan ethnics of the first and second generation Tongans who worship in the Tongan language in the United States of America. In this project, I refer to the Sun Valley United Methodist Church in Granada Hills, California as an example.

Siasi Uesiliana Tau'ataina 'o Tonga: The Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga in Tonga that is similar to the United Methodist Church in America.

Sun Valley United Methodist Church: A Tongan American congregation (Tongan ministry) in the California Pacific Conference of the United Methodist Church.

Tohi Fanongonongo: Free Wesleyan Church of Tongan Monthly Newsletter.

Tohitapu Katoa: The only Holy Bible Tongan translation used in the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga and the Tongan American congregation.

Tongan Hymnal: The Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga Hymn Book consists of 663 hymn songs used in worship and other religious meetings. The majority of the hymn songs are composed by Dr. Moulton, a London missionary and founder of the education in Tonga

Uike Lotu: A Holy Week of prayer on the first week of the year practiced in all Tongan American Congregations.

Tonga Mo'unga kihe Loto: The motto of the Free Wesleyan Church School in Tonga means "Tonga's mountain is my Heart."

Work Previously Done in the Field

Contextualization has been around since the Old Testament. In the Hebrew Bible, many of the stories reflected how the prophets tried to contextualize God's Word. For example, Jeremiah contextualized the Word of God throughout his preaching to the people of Israel when they were in captivity in Babylon (Jeremiah 29). The prophet urged the people of Israel to disregard their status as slaves and to seek peace with the people of Babylon by building homes, planting gardens, and eating what they had produced; in other words, to live as Babylonians in Babylon. The Word of God was incarnate in Jesus Christ to be relevant to us as human beings. Throughout the Gospels,

Jesus preached his sermons in the context of his listeners. For example, he used the parable of the four soils with the hope that his listeners would understand the kingdom of God, because they understood farming.

However, the term *contextualization* was not seriously considered until 1971 when the World Council of Churches Theological Education Fund (TEF) shared their concern that most churches were not effectively relating to the needs, concerns, and interests in the people to whom they were ministering.⁸ As a result, many Third World theologians began to explore and engage the term *contextualization* in an attempt to do Christian ministry in a way that was directly related to the political, social, and economic needs of oppressed people.⁹ Furthermore, evangelicals, and other conservative Christians wished to be more sensitive to the context in which gospel ministry operated while remaining faithful to Scripture.¹⁰ Today contextualization of preaching is taught by many theologians in schools, studied, and shared by scholars and authors through books and other publications and also reflected in sermons that are delivered in churches.

In this project, I will examine some of the studies and books written by many well-known authors such as Paul Tillich (1886-1965), H. Richard Niebuhr, David J. Hesselgrave, Edward Rommen, Stephen B. Bevans, and Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, who shared their work on defining contextualization, by using different approaches and methods of contextualization of the Biblical texts. They used numerous examples to illustrate and to demonstrate their methods and studies done in the field of contextualization.

⁸David J. Hesselgrave, *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally: An Introduction to Missionary Communication*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1991), 134.

⁹David J. Hesselgrave and Edward Rommen, *Contextualization: Meanings, Methods, and Models* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1989), 29.

¹⁰Hesselgrave, 404.

Paul Tillich's book, *Theology of Culture* addressed the issue of communicating the Gospel through the preachers understanding of the context of the listener. To preach, Tillich believes that one must know the Gospel and be aware of the needs of particular persons to whom one is preaching and to relate the two. He believes that through sermon preparation, this principle must always be operational for the preacher. In his last chapter, he states that the message cannot reach the listeners unless it is delivered, received, and understood. So the communication process is crucial in preparing and delivering a message so that the people to whom it is addressed can understand and respond.¹¹

Tillich's suggestion on how to communicate will be incorporated in this project when designing, preparing, and delivering the sermon in the Tongan American Congregation.

The next author who has done some work pertaining to this project is H. Richard Niebuhr. In his book, *Christ and Culture*, Niebuhr discusses the enduring problem that Christians experience in the relationship between Christianity and culture, especially when a Christian is trying to live in a sinful world culture with a perfect Christ. In the New Testament, Paul invites the readers to live in this world but not to conform to this world (Roman 12:2), whereas other passages of scripture suggest that we are to come apart from this world. There seem to be several choices in the Bible with regard to this problem. Niebuhr introduces five views that highlight the attitude of Christians toward Christ and culture and how it affects their faith and understanding of the Gospel. The first view, "Christ against Culture," affirms Christ's authority over culture that requires the loyalty of culture to Christ and that separates Christians from the world. Niebuhr thinks this separation is inadequate because it cannot be achieved without viewing the world as

¹¹ Paul Tillich, *Theology of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), 59.

sinful and Christians as free of sin because they do not belong in the world. Niebuhr believes that when people reject the world, they are not able to commit their lives to Christ because they are not sure of God's nature. The second view is "Christ of Culture," in which Christians seek to maintain fellowship with each other because they interpret culture through Christ by the selection of Jesus' teaching that best fits with the culture.¹² This view seems most relevant for the application of this project because the Tongan American Congregation tries to live a Christian life that conforms to the Tongan culture. In fact, Niebuhr confirms that people were attracted to Christ because of the "harmony of the Christian message with the moral and religious philosophy of their best teachers."¹³ Niebuhr's third view is "Christ above Culture," a view of Christ, the Creator of man and in control of the culture; therefore, it is impossible for society to function without direction from God. The church, therefore, while functioning for a spiritual purpose, has also an earthly purpose of being guardian and custodian of that divine law, and in that sense it serves the world.¹⁴ The negative side of this view, as Niebuhr explains, is that it may lead the church to an institutionalization of Christ and the gospel rather than reaching the goal of salvation and eternal life of each individual. However, this project may consider this view as the goal of contextualizing of preaching the gospel in the Tongan American congregations. The fourth view is "Christ and Culture in Paradox;" similar to "Christ above Culture" but inconsistent with Christian teaching. This view tried to do justice to both by honoring Christ and be responsible for culture.¹⁵ A group called dualist who joins this view saying that Christ is righteous and culture is sin. The dualist

¹² H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper and Bros. Publishers, 1951), 83.

¹³ Niebuhr, 83.

¹⁴ Niebuhr, 136.

¹⁵ Niebuhr, 149.

believes there will always tension and struggle between cultures and Christ because human lived in a sinful and temporal world unless human died, and advanced toward life with Christ. At the meant time, culture recognize the world is sin but do not question as believed to be part of creation. In the Tongan context, the congregation wants to hold their faith in Christ but their responsibility and practice based on culture and tradition. The Tongans know the truth of the Christians teaching but seen culture as part of that teaching and they cannot get out of it. Niebuhr's concern with this view is that Christians tend to accept the culture as it is and ignored the presence of evil or absence of justice in culture. The last view, "Christ the Transformer of Culture," holds that the attitude of Christians toward culture can be very hopeful because they see God as the creator and works within the culture. Therefore, there is hope that Christ can "transform human life in and to the glory of God" through the grace of God.¹⁶ Based on all these different views explored by Niebuhr, my project will consider different ways to deal with culture, but I am most impressed with the last view, "Christ the Transformer of Culture." In fact, the contextualization of preaching the gospel could move the Tongan congregation from Niebuhr's fourth view to achieve the goal of Christ above Culture through Niebuhr's last view.

The work done by Leonora Tubbs Tisdale on *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art*, is considered the most helpful writing in guiding this project in terms of exegesis of the Bible and on how to preach the Gospel effectively in the Tongan American Congregation. Since Tisdale's focus is on the theory and practice of preaching, with research interests in congregational studies, women's ways of preaching, and

¹⁶ Niebuhr, 196.

prophetic preaching, this project is integrating much of her work in this project. In addition, the models put forward by Stephen B. Bevans in his book, *Models of Contextual Theology* are also used in designing the series of sermons.¹⁷ Bevan explains how the gospel message interacts with culture, with honoring the tradition while responding to the gospel. The way Bevan talks about theology and how tradition and people's faith experiences are interwoven together to understand God and God's will is helpful for reflecting on the ways Tongan people understand the gospel. The Tongan people appreciate their culture by using it to articulate their faith and relationship with God. In fact, the Tongan American congregation's positive disposition towards their culture in treating it as good and in harmony with the Gospel needs to be contextualized in different ways by using Bevan's models of articulation to know the truth between culture and Christian faith.

Moreover, David J. Hesselgrave's work *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally*, mentions how to contextualize the Bible and communicate it to a different culture. This will also be used to help direct this project to meet its goals. The Bible uses forms and symbols to describe the time and context of God's story, which sometimes makes it difficult to interpret and translate into our modern context. However, David Hesselgrave has tools to distinguish between cultural form versus meaning, to interpret such cultural differences for better understanding of, communicating, and preaching the Bible.

While contextualization of preaching has been taught, shared, and written about by many theologians, there are not many resources available to guide the Tongan American preacher and his or her congregation in the task of contextualization of the

¹⁷ Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992).

gospel through preaching. However, there are Pacific Islander theologians who have written about contextualizing Theology for Tonga, such as Rev. Dr. Mohenoa Puloka who wrote his Doctor of Ministry Thesis on “Toward Contextualization: An Attempt at Contextualizing Theology for the Tongan Church.” He explains the need of Contextualizing theology in order for the Tongan Church to better understand its role. Puloka raises questions and discusses contextualization among the Tongan religious community and Tongan theologians. This is especially true of his, "*Sisu Tonga*" or "Tongan Jesus," in which he contextualizes the Jesus of Nazareth as a Tongan Jesus. Puloka's theology of *Sisu Tonga* is helpful in designing and communicating the Gospel in the context of the Tongan culture. From a similar perspective, Rev. Dr. Heneli Taliai Niumeitolu has written a thesis in which he discusses how the church controlled by the power structures of the Tongan people needs to contextualize the Gospel into the Tongan church for a deeper transformation of life. A few other papers were presented in the Pacific Journal of Theology, sharing the topic of contextual theology in the Pacific which will also help with my research. I am aware of the challenge that I will face in writing this thesis because of limited resources on the Tongan historical culture, the context of the Tongan church and the history of Tonga and Christianity. However, I have found that two Doctor of Ministry Projects, one by Sunday Olasoji Onadipe on “Contextualization: A Key to Effective Preaching among the Yoruba of Nigeria”,¹⁸ and the other by Seong Soo Yuk, “Contextualization in Korean-American Preaching”¹⁹ are great resources to

¹⁸ Sunday Olasoji Onadipe, "Contextualization: A Key to Effective Preaching among the Yoruba of Nigeria." DMin. project, Claremont School of Theology, 2005.

¹⁹Seong Soo Yuk, "Contextualization in Korean-American Preaching." DMin project, Claremont School of Theology, 2004.

integrate with ideas and solutions that I am trying to produce in this project.

Scope and Limitation

This project focuses mainly on contextualization of preaching in the Sun Valley United Methodist Church in the California Pacific Conference of the United Methodist Church in the United States. The major concern of this project is to preach the Gospel for the understanding of the Tongan culture without losing the true meaning of the Gospel. This project will address only the problems that emerge from my own personal understanding and experiences in my local church where I am currently serving. However, by using the Tongan culture, ethnic identity, spiritual values, stories, music, social structures, economic, and historical background to proclaim the Gospel may help other preachers in all Tongan American congregations and/or denominations.

This project hopes to bring Tongan preachers into a dialogue and conversation on how to prepare, deliver, and preach the gospel in the Tongan context so together the church can respond to the Gospel in Christian ways while still honoring the Tongan culture.

Procedure for Integration

The project will provide practical suggestions for contextualization of preaching from the standpoint of the congregation's context, biblical exegesis, and theology of preaching. The methodology used in this study includes library research to find the works of scholars who have done investigation in the contextualization of preaching. I particularly engage theological and preaching texts from the work of Leonora Tisdale and Stephen Bevans, who highlight the problem of the project and formulate the theoretical framework of contextualization in preaching. The understanding of the Tongan culture

and how it's related to the interpretation of the gospel is described clearly in Bevan's methods of contextual theology. Many Tongan Christians' view of God and culture affect their understanding of the gospel as studied by Niebuhr is also explored in this project.

The next stage in this project is the development of questionnaires for the Tongan American preachers and clergy to inquire into how they prepare and preach their sermons; what they know about the Tongan culture and spiritual heritage; the context of the church and how to preach the biblical texts in the Tongan church. The questions provided information about the methods used to preaching the gospel and how effective those methods are in proclaiming the sermon in the Tongan context. The survey focused on the first generation of the Tongan American church. The results of the questionnaires and surveys helped with the design and preparation of the three sermons preached in the Tongan American congregation of the Sun Valley United Methodist Church. The result of the conversations and interviews with the Sun Valley United Methodist church preachers and first generation Tongan American members validated the effectiveness of contextualization of preaching the gospel in the church. In addition, my experience in ministry as pastor of Sun Valley United Methodist Church and other Tongan American congregations in the California Pacific Conference were also integrated in to this study to highlight the problems and to better understand the purpose of the project.

The final step involved designing, preaching, and analyzing a series of sermons to demonstrate contextualization of preaching in the Tongan American context. After delivering the sermon, I engaged in conversation with a group of first generation Tongan Americans, members of the Sun Valley United Methodist Church. They listened to the

sermon and provided feedback on different aspects of the sermon, including the cultural elements and the over-all impact of the sermon. The integration of theological works and research, the interviews, personal experiences, ministerial practices, and the preaching and analyzing of the sermons make this project a useful tool to help preachers. This research also serves to validate the view that contextualization of preaching leads to more effective proclamation in the Tongan American congregation.

Chapter Outlines

Chapter 1 introduces the thesis statement, problem, and the importance of the problem. Some terms are defined for clarification and the literature review indicates how this project fits into the work that has already been done. The purpose and method of the thesis are explored as well as the outline of each chapter.

Chapter 2 is divided into two parts; the first part illustrates the historical background of Tonga in terms of social, political, cultural, and religious influences. This section discusses how the Tongans live and how Tongan culture influences the Church and Christianity. The second part explains in detail the context of the church in relation to its members, their lifestyle, the practices and faith and how culture is interwoven with the Christian teaching. An overview of the Tongan preaching in worship and spirituality is explored as it is typically practiced.

Chapter 3 addresses contextualization in preaching: its theological foundations, its methods, its terms, and its homiletical implications are discussed. The chapter also includes guidelines for analyzing the context of the congregation, the Bible, and how to contextualize the Gospel through preaching.

Chapter 4 includes the practical aspects of the project such as a series of sermons that are designed to include Tongan history, culture, hymns, sayings, poems, stories, ethnic identity, and power structures. After the sermon is designed, delivered and evaluated, the author shares the analysis of the sermon and the conversations that resulted among the group of listeners on the effectiveness of the sermon and how well they understood the message.

Chapter 5 is the discussion, summary, and my personal reflection on this project. I offer some new insights regarding how to contextualize the message, with recommendations for further research on the theme in a much broader way than the concentrated target population and the preaching context.

CHAPTER 2

UNDERSTANDING THE TONGAN CONTEXT

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to share the religio-cultural background of the Tongan people. This chapter has two parts. First, we will examine the context of the Tongan people in Tonga through the lens of its socio-political system, Tongan religion, Christianity, and the broader culture. Second, we will reflect on the context of the Tongan American Congregation in America by focusing on the life of Tongan people as immigrants to America, the context of the church, its worship, spirituality, and preaching of the gospel.

Historical Background of Tonga

Before the Western contact, Tonga had no written history, other than myths and oral history that had been shared about the origin of the Tongan people. Tonga is believed to have originated from the Lapita people who settled into the Marquesas Islands 3,000 years ago before spreading into the rest of the Polynesian Islands such as Samoa, Fiji, Vanuatu, and the Solomon Islands.²⁰ Some distinctive pottery and arts found at burying sites in Tonga are also prototypes of the Lapita's cultures as well as the idea of kingship and rank in the Tongan social and political organization.²¹ The name “Tonga” meaning south is derived from its geographical location in the southern part of the South Pacific Ocean. Tonga is officially known as the Kingdom of Tonga and it stretches over an area

²⁰ Latukefu, 1.

²¹ Steven Roger Fischer, *A History of the Pacific Islands* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 31.

of 500 square miles with a population of more than 103,000.²² Most of the population lives in four groups of islands, the *Niuas*, *Vava'u*, *Ha'apai*, and *Tongatapu*. This fourth being the largest island where the capital city of Nuku'alofa is located. More than two-thirds of the population resides in *Tongatapu*. Although Tonga is the smallest kingdom in the Pacific Islands, Tonga has a unique history of the longest traditional monarchical system.

Socio-Political System

The social-political system in Tonga is historically described by the principle of rank, power, and hierarchy. One popular narrative is that *Tagaloa* was god of the sky and his son *Tu'i 'Aho'eitu* came from the sky and began to rule as Tonga's first king around 950 A.D.²³ Because of his status and where he came from, King *Aho'eitu* is believed to have divine power and superior knowledge of the sacred to be the first king and absolute ruler of Tonga. He became both the civil and religious ruler and exercised tremendous power over the islands of Tonga and his descendants were the royal family.²⁴ Since then the kingdom of Tonga has been traditionally ruled by the *Ha'a Tu'i Tonga* or Kings long before the early Western missionaries arrived in Tonga. Tongan's social-political system is divided into three classes in the shape of a pyramid with the monarchy on top or the highest class. The next tier is the *houe'iki* or chiefs and the bottom of the pyramid is the *kakai* or the rest of the people. The descending order of the three classes

²² "Tonga National Population and Housing Census 2011," Tonga Department of Statistics, November 15, 2012, <http://spc.int/prism/tonga/> (accessed November 15, 2012).

²³ Latukefu, 1.

²⁴ Latukefu, 1.

differentiated the Tongan people by rank and power.²⁵ Each group or class has their own obligations and responsibilities for each other and can be identified by their rank and title. Rank is fixed from birth and the status is ascribed and validated by genealogies and descendants that formed the hierarchies of the government. In the Western greeting, when one meets someone, they may ask what the individual does for a living. In Tonga, the first question is, "Where are you from?" It seeks to clarify what rank that person is assigned. Therefore Tongans are already set within their class, and there is no confusion since this is set from birth.

Tonga has been ruled by the *Ha'a Tu'i* who is well-known throughout the Pacific rim as the monarchy kingdom. The Tongan people are proud to recognize the *fonua fakatu'i* or monarchy as a kingdom. They are also proud to share that Tonga is not colonized, but instead they are independent under the rule of the monarchy. The coat of arms, "God and Tonga are my Inheritance" stresses the importance of how Tongans feel about God as their authority and protector.²⁶ These words became the motto that explains the King's intention and motivation for the people of Tonga to be placed under the authority of God. Indeed, King Tupou I accepted Christianity in 1826 and unified the kingdom to maintain its political independence rather than depending on any foreigner's power. In 2009, King Siaosi Tupou V ascended to the throne after the death of his father and amended the political structure of the government as part of the democratic reform process. Despite these reforms, however; the Tongan people continue to carry on their responsibility and obligation to the kings and the chiefs. In an interview, one of the

²⁵Charles Valentine, "Social Status, Political Powers, and Native Responses to European Influence in Oceania," in *Cultures of the Pacific*, ed. Thomas Cr. Harding and Ben J. Wallace (New York: Free Press, 1970), 339.

²⁶ Fischer, 146.

influential leaders in Tonga on the Tonga Broadcasting Commission radio affirmed that despite the political changes, the people of Tonga will remain true to our culture by being obedient to our King and honor the chiefs.²⁷ Hence, many of the Tongan people have moved out of the island to foreign countries such as the United States of America, New Zealand, and Australia. Life in Tonga has remained heavily influenced by the indigenous culture and living patterns that have blended together in village life and kinship ties continue to be important throughout the country.²⁸

The result of the survey at the Sun Valley United Methodist Church, which is the target population of this project, affirmed the Tongan respect for the monarchy and the continued esteem of Tongan culture (Appendix A). Therefore, the kingdom of Tonga has remained with its traditional monarchical system as the way of life for Tongan cultures regardless of the new political power structure.

Tongan Culture

To talk about contextualization of the gospel in the Tongan American congregation, one must understand the Tongan cultural heritage and the life of the Tongan people. The gospel has been preached in Tonga since 1826, yet the deep values of the Tongan culture, the hierarchical arrangement of Tongan society and of indigenous religion remain a challenge when trying to understand the gospel. Helen Morton Lee claims that "the *anga fakatonga* and Christianity have been interwoven to such an extent that they cannot be disentangled."²⁹ Therefore, the process of contextualizing the gospel has yet to occur in preaching for a better understanding in the Tongan American

²⁷ Interview of Subject #1. With respect for the privacy of individual interviewees, their names are not given.

²⁸ Helen Morton Lee, *Becoming Tongan: An Ethnography of Childhood* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1996), 20.

²⁹ Helen Morton Lee, *Tongans Overseas*, 22.

congregation.

The term culture is a very inclusive and complex term to attempt to define, or describe, and categorize. However, this project will focus on H. Richard Niebuhr's definition of culture, "the artificial secondary which humans impose on the natural. It comprises language, habits, ideas, beliefs, customs, social organization, inherited artifacts, technical processes and values."³⁰ In addition, Joseph R. Jeter and Ronald Allen define culture as a "system of shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviors and artifacts that the members of a society use to cope with their world and with one another."³¹ These definitions involved assist in explaining the meaning of cultures in the Tongan context. Lee clarifies it, "The Tongan culture or *anga fakatonga* is frequently invoked in everyday life in Tonga as both the defining element of Tongan identity, values and behaviors that comprise the Tongan cultures."³² The *anga fakatonga* or Tongan culture consists of four golden strands of respect or *faka'apa'apa*, sharing or *fetokoni'aki*, commitment or *mateaki* and love. These four golden strands identified Tongans values, customs and behaviors that embedded in the life of Tongans as they live and behave in the society.³³ This identity evidences in the way they show their love, honor, and respect to the king and chiefs, regardless of where the Tongan people live. Lee mentions that, "the concept is central to Tongan identity, both in relations to outsiders, to whom Tongans stress the importance and value of their monarchical, highly ranked social structure, and to Tongans themselves, for whom rank and status are fundamental aspects of everyday life and

³⁰Niebuhr, 32.

³¹ Joseph R. Jeter and Ronald J. Allen, *One Gospel, Many Ears: Preaching for Different Listeners in the Congregation* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2002) 104.

³²Helen Morton Lee, *Becoming Tongan*, 20.

³³Latukefu, 20.

crucial components in the construction of individuals' sense of self."³⁴

The act of respect lies at the core of the Tongan culture that has distinguished Tonga from the rest of the Pacific islands. It is expressed in the relationship between the monarchy, chiefs, and the people. To be a true Tongan, one must show respect towards each other, especially the commoners toward the king and chiefs. In the relationship of the family and community, the women are higher in status than men. In the church, respect is expressed in the relationship between the church members and the minister and elders. The use of the Tongan language is also evidence on how the Tongans speak to each other. When the chief or commoners speak to the king, there are certain behaviors and rules to follow, such as bowing down before the king or being seated before one speaks to them. Respect can also be expressed through the way Tongan people help each other or *fetokoni'aki*. One can see how the Tongan people live in community as one senses the unity, love, and oneness. One characteristic of Tongans is that they rarely think of themselves but instead think of the whole village as themselves and the sense of being in community in everything they do. Lee indicates that village identity is important to Tongans as an aspect of their island identity.³⁵ Members of Tongan families take care of one another almost unconditionally. In Tonga, families are comprised of grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins and are identified with the village in which they grew up in and where their great grandparents or descendants lived. In every village there is always a church and community building found in the center of the village.

By being a *fonua 'eni 'o Tupou* or our land belongs to King *Tupou*, Tongans believe that obedience to God is the same as being obedient to the king and chiefs.

³⁴Helen Morton Lee, *Becoming Tongan*, 23.

³⁵Helen Morton Lee, *Tongan Overseas*, 27.

Captain Cook spoke of how the commoners were apparently proud of their chiefly connections and spent much time to share how they related and willingly served them as the greatest upon earth.³⁶ The Tongan people expressed their love for their king by devoting their lives in serving them with their time and wealth or *inasi*. Captain Cook wrote about how the Tongan people performed the *Inasi* ceremony. He states that “the commoners must bring their best fruits and offer to gods in worship in the honor of the kings and the chiefs.”³⁷ In the Tongan churches, one can recognize the traditional *inasi* by the members of giving *tapa* cloth, fine mats, and food to the kings and chiefs on special celebrations such as birthdays, weddings or funerals. Missionaries thought of the *inasi* ceremony as “incompatible with the Christian principles and the Western moral standards.”³⁸ However, Tongans believed it to be part of who they are as true Tongans to express their respect and keep their relationship or *tauhi vaha 'a* for each other.³⁹

Lotu or religion began in Tonga first before it spread into the Pacific islands. Tongans believe that they were the first who brought the *lotu* to Samoa and Fiji for they saw themselves as better and more religious than any other of the islanders in the Pacific. Throughout the history of Tonga, there were many missionaries from Tonga sent to the Solomon Islands, Fiji, and Samoa to preach the gospel and introduce Christianity. The idea of being the originator of Christianity in the Pacific Islands added to the Tongan belief that Tonga was the land of religious people or *fonua lotu*. Unfortunately, however, there is a misunderstanding between being religious and being a Christian. A good example of this is a true story about a Tongan young man who was in the ordination

³⁶ Latukefu, 31.

³⁷ Latukefu, 31.

³⁸ Latukefu, 31.

³⁹ Latukefu, 32.

process for elder and who went before the Board of Ordained Ministry for an oral interview. He was discontinued not only for adhering to Tongan cultural beliefs but for being a religious person. When he was asked to share why he thought he was being called to ministry, the young man shared his religious background as the reason to pursue ordination and because his father was a minister and was only following his family tradition in becoming a minister.

Although Tongans believe that all the Tongan people are religious, there are conflicts and differences that reflect the gap between the Tongan cultures and living out the Christian teaching. Tongans viewed aspects of their Tongan indigenous religion as compatible with the Christian teaching and as the heart-beat of their social lives. Tongans believed there to be a direct connection between the Tongan cultures and Christianity in many ways. For example, the way the Tongan people offer hospitality and generosity in their giving to the chiefs is part of what Jesus said when he said to share with the poor and the needy. The way the Tongans live as a community by helping each other is what God requires of people to “do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with God” (Micah 6:8). It has been easier for Tongans to respond to the gospel because they already know how to show respect, honor, and love towards the king and chiefs. It was a matter of transferring the way they honor their gods to the new God that the missionaries were introducing and teaching. In fact, Tongans believe that keeping their traditions and cultures helped them become good Christians. However, the love for God became a demand rather than a responsibility of the Christian. Therefore, the gospel needs to be preached in the context of the Tongan people’s life experiences and cultures. In order for Tongans to gain a better understanding of God’s living word and the biblical truth,

Tongan people need to live and behave in Christian ways rather than the *anga fakatonga*. When the missionaries from the London Missionary Service visited Tongan they taught Bible in the light of the Wesleyan doctrines. Latukefu explained that it was easier for the Tongan to understand the Bible when they were taught the concept of God, Human, and Morality in the context of the Tongan cultures and traditional gods that they had experienced.⁴⁰

Tongan Indigenous/Traditional Religion before Christianity

Religion is woven into almost every aspect of daily life of the Tongan people. Before Christianity was introduced and accepted by the king of Tonga in 1826, Tongan people were worshipping their indigenous gods. Some of them worshipped the rocks and mountains while others worshipped the fish, the moon, the sun, and the trees, or their ancestors who had died. They believed their spirits could be recalled to bring advice and aid to the family and relatives that remained on earth. Others worshipped some Tongan traditional gods such as *Tagaloa*, the god of the sky or *Pulotu*, the god of the dead. The commoners were treated as slaves and not allowed to pray or speak to their gods.⁴¹ The kings and the chiefs functioned as the priests that spoke for the rest of the people as they worshipped their gods. When they gathered to worship for long hours, the chiefs would demand the commoners to bring various foods such as pigs and offer them as sacrifices to their indigenous gods. Each god represented some power that the Tongans believed would bring healing and comfort for the sick through the spirits of their gods. They believed a natural disaster to be a sign of punishment and their god's anger against people's evil deeds. Therefore, the chief would offer sacrifices to their gods for

⁴⁰ Latukefu, 53.

⁴¹ Valentine, 340.

reconciliation and healing after a storm or hurricane. The missionaries recognized these Tongan cultures and ritual practices as pagan and heathen. Obviously, the missionaries understood that the Tongan people had a lack of in depth knowledge about the living God and Christianity.

Christianity in Tonga

The new religion called "Christianity" reached Tonga in 1826 and King Taufa'ahau, George Tupou I was converted and Christianity continued to spread throughout the islands. This was started by a group of missionaries from England led by Walter Lawry of the Wesleyan Missionary Society. It was not too long after King Taufa'ahau's conversion that Christianity became a strong religious influence on the Tongan way or "*anga fakaTonga*."⁴² King Taufa'ahau set out to destroy the worship houses and put an end to the worship of old gods. Latukefu writes that when the king visited the island of Vava'u, "He rose, went into the god's house, dragged out the Priest, and anointed him plentifully with mud from the gutter and threw him on one side telling him as an old deceiver to have done with his foolishness."⁴³ When King Taufa'ahau first preached, he dressed in a suit like the London missionary to affirm his accepting the new religion brought by the London missionaries.⁴⁴ The king never looked back to his old gods, instead he continued to /joins the small group Bible study and encouraged the chiefs and the people to study the Bible. When people gathered to offer *King Taufa'ahau* their *inasi* or first fruits of their harvest, the king commanded the people "to express their

⁴²John F. Garrett, *Footsteps in the Sea: Christianity in Oceania to World War II* (Suva, Fiji: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, in association with the World Council of Churches, 1992), 141.

⁴³Latukefu 102.

⁴⁴Latukefu, 98.

thanksgiving to God instead, for if it were not for Him they would all have been killed.”⁴⁵ The chiefs perceived the king’s action in terms of his Christian faith and began to follow him. In return, people were free from working hard every year to bring *inasi* to the chiefs. Moreover, the king’s conversion and accepting of Christianity united the kingdom of Tonga under the rule of *King Taufa’ahau*.

Tonga became a Christian kingdom with the majority of the people belonging to the Free Wesleyan Church or *Siasi Uesiliana Tau’ataina ’o Tonga* and the Wesleyan doctrine became the dominant belief. Church practices and Christian teachings became woven into almost every aspect of daily life. Helen Morton Lees argues, "Of all the factors contributing to the historical transformation of Tongan culture or *anga fakatonga*, the Tongans adoption and adaptation of Christianity has wrought the deepest and most pervasive changes, so much so that the categories of tradition and Christianity are now inseparable in the minds of many Tongans."⁴⁶ The new religion not only moved the people to worship God as the Almighty and Creator of heaven and earth but also to change and adjust the old social system. The Tongan Constitution mentions that, "The Sabbath Day shall be sacred in Tonga forever."⁴⁷ When the people gathered to worship on Sunday, *Misa Tana*, one of the missionaries reported that people gathered all day from morning until night and prayed. It was more like a rain of the spirit from heaven how these people fell on their faces, cried out to God’s mercy in repentance for the forgiveness of their sin. Indeed, all shops became closed, and everyone went to church to attend worship services where they would hear preaching on Sundays.

⁴⁵ Latukefu, 98.

⁴⁶ Helen Morton Lee, *Becoming Tongan*, 12.

⁴⁷ Latukefu, 253.

Although there are rituals and old Tongan religious practices in the church today, the majority of the Tongan people believes in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior and follows the Christian teaching. Tonga has emerged as a new society of Christian values with its social, economic, and political institutions that closely integrate the traditional religious system. The new religion was not only accepted by the King but also became part of the Tongan way of life or *anga fakatonga*. John Garrett states, “Christianity entered Tonga and was absorbed by the Tongans as integral to the *anga fakatonga*, the Tonga way.”⁴⁸ The chiefs were the great influence in leading the people to adopt the new religion of Christianity in Tonga. Latukefu affirms that the great success of the missionaries was the support they received from the chiefs.⁴⁹

As a result, the mixture of Christianity with the Tongan cultures has created some confusion and misunderstanding so that the people’s practices are sometimes based on the Christian teaching and other times on Tongan culture. Latukefu notes, “They (Tongans) had no reason to doubt the validity of the old order, and they were eager to maintain the status quo. Others, on the other hand, became disillusioned by what they interpreted as the failure of their gods to achieve what they wanted, and began to acquire the new religion.”⁵⁰ However, Tongans continue to worship the living God and believe they are Christians or “*kakai lotu*.” The new religion or Christianity not only come to Tonga to stay but also became the most influential religion in the kingdom of Tonga as of today. In fact, the Christian churches in Tonga have grown into more than 50 independent churches and more than half of those churches have spread into America

⁴⁸ Garrett, *Footsteps in the Sea*, 141.

⁴⁹ Latukefu, 59.

⁵⁰ Latukefu, 59-60.

when the Tongan people immigrated to the United States.⁵¹

History of the Tongan People in America

Tongans began leaving their villages and immigrating to New Zealand, Australia, and the United States in the early 50's and 60's. What began as temporary migration in search of work and education steadily became permanent. Many of the Tongan people here in the United States of America are still clinging to the Tongan traditions and cultures despite having lived in the United States of America for more than four decades.⁵² This means that they come to the United States of America to improve their lives, yet they are still practicing their cultures, speaking the Tongan language and dressing like a Tongan in church and in public. They have not moved out of Tonga to change their lifestyles and language, but instead; they have moved out of Tonga to gain a higher education, experience economic, and social security, by living in a better environment. Based on the survey taken for this research, 90% of the respondents stated that they moved to America for a better quality of life but Tonga has remained their home. Only 10% responded that they wanted to make America their home (Appendix A). Obviously from this response, the Tongan people have moved overseas to improve their lives but not to change their culture or their identity as Tongans. The most obvious way Tongans maintain their cultural identity in America is through their interactions with the Tongan community, the fellowship in the church and their celebrations. Their religious practices and celebrations still manifest the Tongan culture that is relevant to the Tongan way of doing things in their homeland.

One of the most important values that the people of Tonga have brought that has

⁵¹ Tohi Fanongonongo, *Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga Monthly Newsletter*, November 2012.

⁵² Helen Morton Lee, *Tongan Overseas*, 91.

sustained their identity, culture, and heritage is the church or *lotu*. It was told that when the Tongan people settled in Hawaii, the first thing they did was to find a church in order to worship. The majorities of the people who emigrate from Tonga are from the Wesleyan tradition, and look for Methodist churches to worship in. In fact, the First United Methodist Church of Honolulu identifies as the first Tongan ministry in the United States. I spoke with one of the first few Tongans who attended this church and he recalls, "It was such a blessing to see the Tongan community gathered to worship in our own native tongue and sing our Tongan hymns in the church. I remembered hearing the Tongan hymn sung in the Tongan language was the most spiritual moment of my life after being in Hawaii for more than ten years."⁵³

In 1960, the Tongan people began to spread into California and other states where they brought their faith and cultures while finding a place to live. In the midst of their displacement and identity crisis, Tongans sought, and found refuge in the church, a place where they could meet with other Tongans, speak their own language, and comfort themselves in the strange milieu of America. The church was for them the community of deliverance, belonging, and fellowship. It was the heart of Tongan people's life. Wherever the Tongans live, there is a Tongan American congregation. Since then Tongan churches in Methodist Wesleyan tradition have increased in numbers and many other denominations have started their own congregations.

Tongan American Congregation in Context

It is important to know the distinctive historical and cultural background of the people preaching the gospel in a Tongan American Congregation. The people of Tonga have been involved in church and have made it a very important part of their lives no

⁵³ Interview with Subject #2.

matter where they reside. The church is the places where Tongans practice their faith in God nurture their spirituality and receive communal support from each other in fellowship. Almost every Tongan in America belongs to a church and their lives revolve around the church. After serving the Sun Valley UMC for almost eight years, I recognize the importance of keeping the Tongan culture and identity in connection with how they practice their faith. It is common for people to frequently visit one another's homes, and hold worship, church choir and fellowship. Other small group gatherings include the men who hold a Kava ceremony almost every weekend at the parsonage or pastor's home. The survey discloses the importance of belonging to a Tongan church where they could practice the culture, speak the language and hear the biblical stories in the Tongan context (Appendix A).

The Context of the Sun Valley United Methodist Church

Sun Valley United Methodist Church is a small congregation of Tongan people who immigrated to America as early as the 1980s and settled in San Fernando Valley, California. Sun Valley United Methodist Church became a Tongan congregation in 1994 where worship has been provided in the Tongan language, and membership of Tongan people who immigrate to the San Fernando Valley continues to grow. Sun Valley UMC is one of the 32 Tongan ministries in the California-Pacific Conference and the only Tongan congregation of the Methodist denomination in the North District. As of December 31, 2011, Sun Valley UMC has a total membership of 124 members: 60 of first generation Tongan Americans, 20 are 1.5 generation Tongan Americans, and 44 consists of youth and children of second and third generation Tongan Americans.⁵⁴ On

⁵⁴ United Methodist Church, California-Pacific Annual Conference, "The Cup Overflowing 2011: Ministry with the Poor," 27th *Annual Conference Journal*, June 16-19, 2011.

any Sunday worship service, there are approximately 70% first generation Tongan Americans, 10% 1.5 and 20% second and third generation Tongan American who attend regularly to hear the gospel being preached in the Tongan language.⁵⁵ Even though the Sun Valley UMC belongs to the United Methodist system, the members who live out their faith remain the remnants of the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga. Most of the members prefer using the Free Wesleyan Church's order of worship, singing the hymns and praying in Tongan because that is the way they understand church. Regardless of where the listener to the gospel came from, either from the same denomination or not, what matters most is for the listener to understand the message in his or her context. The group discussion of the sermon delivered in the church expressed the joy of being able to understand the message when the preacher included the Tongan history, stories, hymns and saying. One preacher recalls how he was able to connect the story of the rich man to himself in related to the Tongan way of living as religious person rather than being a Christian (Appendix B). Therefore, the need for having the gospel biblically contextualized specifically into their mental framework needs to be the priority of the preacher. If the gospel is not contextualized and preached into the context of the Tongan people, the gospel remains a “resounding gong or a clanging cymbal” (1 Corinthians 13:1b), and still a mystery in the mind of the Tongan people.

Context of Worship in the Sun Valley United Methodist Church

Even though Sun Valley UMC shares so much in common with other Christians when worshipping God according to the biblical teaching, there are some unique elements of Tongan worship that are worthy of noticing due to the influence of Tongan

⁵⁵ Sun Valley United Methodist Church, “Charge Conference Report 2011.” This is the annual report prepared by the church for the Charge Conference on November 11, 2011, Granada Hills, California.

culture. The seating arrangement in the church represents the rank and power of each church member. If there is a member of the royal family or chief present during worship, he or she is seated in the front section of the congregation in order to differentiate him or her from the rest of the people in the church. The respect for the monarchy, chiefs, church leaders, elders, and parents in the church can be seen in the worship service. The missionary reports mention that when *King Taufa'ahau* saw that the pulpit was higher than his seat in the church, he asked to raise his seat so he could look down upon the preacher.⁵⁶ Even though the *King Taufa'ahau* converted to Christianity, he still clung to the traditional notion that obedience to the gods and obedience to the chiefs was the same thing: therefore everyone under his rule should follow him into Christianity. In fact, Garrett acknowledges that the “Methodist fellowship, expressed in hymns celebrating saving grace, was woven into the fabric of Tongan culture.”⁵⁷

The worship is designed around the *anga fakatonga* not only in the seating arrangement but also the order of worship, the delivering of the sermon and behavior of the people during the service. The preacher picks the hymns according to the sermon's theme and the rest of the order of the worship is coordinated with the scriptures and preaching. For the eight years that I have been serving here in Sun Valley, the order of worship has reflected the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga's traditional order of worship. The whole order has remained practically unchanged as the way they believe is the proper way to worship God. In fact, the standard order of worship that one can find in the majority of the Free Wesleyan churches or the United Methodist churches of a Tongan American Congregation.

⁵⁶Latukefu, 101.

⁵⁷ Garrett, *Footsteps in the Sea*, 145.

The Tongan people also value fellowship when they come to worship God regardless of how much time is taken. There is a saying that says: the Tongan people control the clock rather than vice versa. Time is not as important as having the community all gathered in the sanctuary for worship. The Tongan people love to sing. The Tongan Hymnal that is used in the church consists of 663 hymns in the Tongan language where most Tongan people have memorized and know the tune by heart. There are hymns that are sung in worship that reflect the language of being proud to be a monarchy kingdom and at the same time being a religious people such as in hymn number 360, 461, and 540. More recently Tongan theologians have argued that the theology of some of these hymns speak about honoring the traditional gods rather than honoring God, and should be banned from singing in the church. However, most of the hymns express the faith of the Tongan people within the divine Trinity.

Context of Spirituality of the Sun Valley United Methodist Church

As much as Tongans love to worship and sing, they will strive to make worship a priority, and show reverence for God in the devotional and spiritual moments of worship. They express their spirituality and warm heart toward God in many ways. Tongan people are very emotional when they sing, pray, preach, or even listen to sermons. Singing is at the heart of every worship service, prayer meetings, and special events in the Tongan churches. One day, my daughter asked me, “Why is the preacher yelling from the pulpit and crying at the same time?” I replied, because Tongans experience the spirit of God in their hearts.”⁵⁸ So often when one feels the Spirit while reading the Bible or praying, one comes to express this with tears.

⁵⁸ Conversation with Subject #3.

The Tongan people's act of respect for others is also reflected in their spirit of love and community life as an expression of their love for God. As a *fonua lotu* or religious people, for Tongans there is nothing more important in life than to give everything in the name of God. Tongan belief of giving is embedded in the Tongan people's minds. There is a Tongan saying that you "give until you feel the pain" which means that you give until you feel the Spirit. Therefore, the Tongan people's spirituality is not only experienced in worship but also through the act of giving or *fetokoni 'aki*. Celebrating the *misinale* or annual collection of the tithe to the church has played a very important part of the Tongan American congregation spiritual life. The day begins with a worship service where each family acknowledges the amount of money they will be giving. Then there is a feast during which gifts are offered to the chiefs, ministers, and special guests who attend the *misinale*. The *misinale* reflects the ancient practice of the *inasi* offering or tributes that used to be given to the chief by the commoners before Christianity came to Tonga.

Other context of the Tongan spiritual life is attending the church's activities and other special services. Following John Wesley's emphasis on spirituality and his insistence that people should avail themselves to the means of grace, the Sun Valley UMC has special services throughout the week.⁵⁹ The church is divided into small groups or *kalasi 'aho* similar to John Wesley's small groups of society where the members give testimony. The men gather every Saturday evening for *kava* circle where they share stories, participate in Bible study and fellowship. The Tongan churches also celebrate the New Year with a holy week of prayer or *Uike Lotu*, followed with the

⁵⁹John Wesley, *John Wesley: A Representative Collection of His Writings*, ed. Albert C. Outler (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 355.

Easter celebration, Children's Sunday or *FakaMe*, Mother's Day, and Father's Day in May, and conclude the year with Watch Night. Again these traditional worship services were a long tradition of the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga that the Tongan American congregation continues to practice here in America.

In the Tongan context, spirituality, and preaching are inseparable. When the preacher is asked to preach, there are expectations for the preacher from the preparation of the sermon to its delivery. A good preacher is the one who is empowered by God to preach, while engaging with the listeners.⁶⁰ In the Tongan churches, when the preacher is spiritual, the message, and all other components become spiritual as well. I am convinced that the witness of the Holy Spirit should be the central importance in preaching.

Context of Preaching of the Sun Valley United Methodist Church

The Bible is the primary source for the Tongan preacher to use in preaching. The Tongan American congregations hold particularly fervent feelings about the Bible as the only book that witness the love of God through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. In fact, the Tongan preachers hold true to the Bible as only God's Word that shares the history of the Christian faith. Many Tongan preachers only use the Bible to preach with the help of the Holy Spirit to interpret the Word for them. Tisdale writes, "In the dance of interpretation for contextual preaching, Scripture is a leading partner."⁶¹ Tisdale encourages the preacher to begin with the Scripture in determining the theme before inquiring into other sources because the Bible embodies the stories and history of who God is and how God relates to the world. In the context of the Tongan congregation whose culture has been embedded in the mind of the people, the Scripture can shape and

⁶⁰Paul Scott Wilson, *The Practice of Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 23.

⁶¹ Tisdale, 94.

transform the mind and heart of the congregation. By the help of the Holy Spirit and the witness of the Scripture, the church could experience the vision and will of God in the midst of the world. To become an effective preacher it is important to learn to think, to feel, and to act as a part of the congregation.

In addition to the Bible, preaching is the most important element of the worship experience in the Tongan context. In fact, preaching is the heart of the worship service in the Tongan American congregation. Preaching is not just sharing God's Word but it is the preacher's response to God's Word revealed in the Bible with the help of the Holy Spirit. In every step of preparing a sermon, the Tongan preacher must pray and meditate on God's Word. The Tongan people are known for their prayer life. The pastor prays for God on behalf of the congregation and the congregation would pray for the pastor and the preacher as well. There is a distinctive form of prayer in the Tongan congregation that is known as intercessory prayer or *lotu talilotu*. Instead of having the pastor or preacher pray the congregation prays out loud.

In the Tongan church, a good preacher is the one who shows respect to God and honors the chief and those listening to the message. Before beginning the sermon, he or she must first honor God by saying "*Fakatapu kihe 'Otua Mafimafi*" meaning, "I would like to pay my respect to our Heavenly Father." Second, the preacher is to acknowledge the rank of the congregation that is given to the *Fakatapu* or to the royalty, and the chiefs, including their children and grandchildren. Third, the preacher is to recognize the *matapule* or spokesperson for the chiefs where every church has its own *matapule*. The preacher will recognize the Pastor, Lay Leader, the elders, mothers, youth, and the Sunday school children. If there are visitors, they are also recognized before delivering

the message. This is the standard order of delivering a speech or a sermon in the context of the Tongan American Congregation. One member of the Sun Valley UMC once asked one of the Tongan ministers from Tonga who visited our church the reason for having the *fakatapu* before preaching. The pastor replied,

It is the recognition of God the highest and to identify each member's rank and title as a way of welcoming and preparing them to hear the gospel. If the preacher does not recognize the people in the church, the listeners may feel offended and the sermon will not be well received by the listeners.⁶²

In order to engage faithfully with the text and the listeners, the preacher must understand the context of the listeners is living in and how they are experiencing life.

Ronald Allen states, "Preachers must attend to the postmodern context. An awareness of the ambiguities and uncertainties that are in the hearts of many Christians can help the preacher retell the Christian story for our time."⁶³ These are the challenges for those who will preach in the Tongan American congregation.

Tongan preaching is truly distinct from other preaching because of its use of Tongan cultural images to illustrate sermons. The language and how the message is delivered is also very important for preaching the gospel in the Tongan church. The most creative cultural imagination of Tonga comes from the Tongan language itself (see Appendix A, #13). Language is one of the most complex but refined forms of cultural expression, conveying the many subtleties of human emotion and cognition. As previously mentioned the Tongan language expresses respect among the people in the Tongan churches, hence, it is important to know the right words to say to the monarch and the chiefs.

⁶² Interview with Subject #4.

⁶³ Ronald J. Allen, Barbara S. Blaisdell, and Scott Black Johnston, *Theology for Preaching: Authority Truth and Knowledge of God in a Postmodern Ethos* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1977), 29.

Conclusion

Tongan culture is alive in Tongan American churches and Tongans continue to practice and worship God in ways that reflect their context, and understanding of their Tongan culture. Therefore, it is important for the preacher to know the Tongan historical background and its socio-political systems as well. This knowledge should include how Tongans understand the gospel and live their lives in service to God as Christians.

Preachers should understand the method of contextualizing the gospel while preaching in the Tongan American Congregation for the gospel to be understood and lived out in the Tongan church. Therefore the focus in the next chapter will be on the best methods to contextualize the gospel for Tongan American congregations that are strongly influenced by Tongan culture and way of life.

CHAPTER 3

TOWARD CONTEXTUALIZATION OF PREACHING

Introduction

In order to explore the significance of contextualization of preaching in the Tongan American congregation this chapter is divided into three parts. First, I will define the meaning of contextualization. Second, I will describe how contextualization in preaching of the gospel will bring meaningful understanding to the context of the Tongan American congregation. Third, I shall define the best methods of contextualization that can be used in preaching the gospel in the Tongan American congregation.

History and Meaning of Contextualization

In theology, contextualization is most often discussed in terms of missionary work. In the Great Commission, the Lord Jesus commands His disciples to “*go into the world and preach the good news to all creation*” (Mark 16:15). This command asks the missionaries to go out to a world that has so many cultural differences and to find a way to preach the gospel and its power to change lives. The missionary must seek ways to present the gospel to those who have never heard it or those who have heard it but have never understood it. He or she is to present it in such a way that it makes sense, culturally speaking, and answers their primary spiritually related questions. Although the Word of God is relevant to all people in all cultures and fully authoritative and inspired by God, the preacher must find a way to present the gospel.

This was the issue that the leaders of the Third World Conference (TWC) engaged in as they discussed how to share the message of the gospel and go “*into all the*

world” with different ways of life and cultures.⁶⁴ The Third World Conference commonly understood that if the missionaries needed to reach other cultures and religious groups, it was also important for them to use an approach that used people’s language and engaged with their concepts. The Third World Conference hoped to find an approach that would bring all countries together in order to understand the Bible by entering into the struggles of humanity at any historical moment. This would be done with the view of discovering what God was doing and saying in that particular context. A good example is the emergence of Liberation Theology to address specific issues of poverty and marginalization in Latin American countries and Black theology spoke to the concerns of Black Americans and South Africans. In Tonga and the Pacific, the Coconut Theology is presented by Rev. Dr. Amanaki Havea as a way to interpret theology in the context of the island of Tonga, and the Pacific Island’s issues. ‘Amanaki Havea introduced Coconut theology as identifying with the life of the Pacific islanders. Havea says,

If Jesus had grown up and lived in the Pacific, He could have added another identification of himself, I am the Coconut of Life. Jesus as a Pacific Islander could have used all the parts of the coconut plant in so many different ways as many Biblical concepts, because coconut trees can be used for drinks, food, housing, and mats. The Tongan can use the coconut meat and juice in Holy Communion to symbolize Jesus’ body and blood.⁶⁵

The gospel is truly cross-cultural and must be presented in a way that each culture can apprehend. The inspiration of the Bible can be experienced in all contexts and the words of preachers and theologians help to interpret God's saving acts in history and to make

⁶⁴Hesselgrave, 134.

⁶⁵Consultation on Pacific Theology, *South Pacific Theology: Papers from the Consultation on Pacific Theology, Papua New Guinea, January 1986*, foreword by Sione ‘Amanaki Havea (Paramatta, N.S.W., Australia: World Vision International South Pacific, 1987), 13.

them real and available today.⁶⁶ As a result of the Third World Conference, the term “*contextualization*” was introduced as the new approach or method to communicate the gospel in any context or any culture.⁶⁷ Many scholars began to use the method of contextualization through preaching and teaching of the Bible to help address the issues in their cultural contexts.

In the biblical context, David Hesselgrave explains contextualization is "a new approach to theologizing that involved, not so much wrestling with the text of Scripture to determine its meaning, but entering into the struggles of humanity at any historical moment with a view to discovering what God is doing and saying in that context."⁶⁸ The biblical books were written in a particular context and Hesselgrave believes that the meaning of contextualization is to translate, interpret, adapt, or apply the body of truth of the Scripture to the people of a respondent culture in such a way as to preserve as much of its original meaning and relevance as possible.⁶⁹ In the Pacific theology, Havea suggests that the Bible needs to be contextualized into the Pacific context for the better understanding of the gospel. Havea explains, "Theology is a gift of God. It is God's revelation to history and culture therefore it is an effort to interpret and to see with Pacific eyes, and to listen with Pacific ears. Then, instead of being foreign, it should become local and indigenized and contextualized."⁷⁰

Contextualization became the theological approach or method to communicate the gospel in order to gain a greater understanding of one's situation, history or context.

⁶⁶ William J. Larkin, *Culture and Biblical Hermeneutics: Interpreting and Applying the Authoritative Word in a Relativistic Age* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wipf & Stock Publisher, 2003), 235.

⁶⁷ Hesselgrave, 136.

⁶⁸ Hesselgrave and Rommen, 136.

⁶⁹ Hesselgrave and Rommen, 135.

⁷⁰ Havea, in *Consultation on Pacific Theology*, 11.

Brian H. Kato's concern for the church and the fulfillment of its calling in the world through contextualization of the Gospel became the way to address African issues rather than the Western theology. As Kato states, "I am fully in favor of the ever-abiding gospel being expressed within the context of Africa, for Africans to understand."⁷¹ Bruce Nicholls also agrees that contextualization is "the translation of the unchanging content of the Gospel of the Kingdom into verbal form meaningful to the peoples in their separate cultures and within their particular existential situation."⁷²

Contextualization is the way to articulate the gospel and its power to change lives in a culturally appropriate context like in a Tongan American congregation. For example, the Tongan understand contextualization as the way to communicate the scripture in terms of living out the implications of the gospel in the way that God is saying and doing in the Tongan context or situation. George W. Peters suggests that, "contextualization properly applied means to discover the legitimate implications of the gospel in a given situation."⁷³ David Hesselgrave provides a more extensive definition:

Contextualization can be thought of as the attempt to communicate the message of the person, works, word, and will of God in a way that is faithful to God's revelation especially as it is put forth in the teachings of Holy Scripture, and that is meaningful to respondents in their respective cultural and existential contexts. Contextualization is both verbal and nonverbal and has to do with theologizing; Bible translation, interpretation and application; incarnational lifestyle; evangelism; Christian instruction; church planting and growth; church organization; worship style, indeed with all of those activities involved in carrying

⁷¹ Brian H. Kato, *African Cultural Revolution and the Christian Faith* (Jos, Nigeria: Challenge Publications, 1976), 54.

⁷² Bruce Nicholls, "Theological Education and Evangelization," in *Let the Earth Hear His Voice*, ed. J. D. Douglas (Minneapolis: World Wide, 1975), 647, cited in David J. Hesselgrave, *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally: An Introduction to Missionary Communication*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1991), 136.

⁷³ George Peters, "Issues Confronting Evangelical Missions, in Wade T. Coggins and E. L. Frizen, eds., *Evangelical Missions Tomorrow* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey, 1977), 169, cited in David J. Hesselgrave, *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally: An Introduction to Missionary Communication*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1991), 137.

out of the Great Commission.⁷⁴

Contextualization aims to enter the cultural context and discern what God is doing and saying in that context and speaking to the people in their language so they could understand the message in order to change and respond. Moreover, Sr. Keiti Ann Kanongata'a responding to the question, "Why Contextual?" She noted how through the colonial experience, some people in Oceania have been "raped of their cultural honour" so that now there is need for a theology that "will uplift us from our powerlessness to our God-given dignity."⁷⁵ Therefore in this project, contextualization in preaching is the method used to preach the gospel in the Tongan American congregation for a greater understanding of God's Word in the Tongan context and culture for participation and action.

Why Contextualization in Preaching?

Tillich asks the question in his book, "How do we communicate the Gospel so that others will accept it?"⁷⁶ Tisdale provides a helpful response:

Preaching needs to become more contextualized in our day not to make the gospel more palatable, more appealing, or even more persuasive (despite encouragement from some quarters to do so). Preaching needs to attend more carefully to cultural context so the gospel may be more clearly heard and understood by all sorts of people in all sorts of settings.⁷⁷

Kurewa also agrees with Tisdale that preaching must be sensitive to the cultural and congregational context in which it takes place. He believes that every congregation lives in a "specific habitat with distinctive sensibilities about appropriate dress, language, ways

⁷⁴ Hesselgrave and Rommen, 143-44.

⁷⁵ Keiti Ann Kanongata'a, "Why Contextual?" *The Pacific Journal of Theology*, Series II, 27 (2002): 25.

⁷⁶ Tillich, 201.

⁷⁷ Tisdale, 35.

of talking, music, art, and length of sermon and service.”⁷⁸ When the gospel is contextualized in preaching, it brings the gospel into the context of the people and helps address relevant issues that touch the lives of listeners to have a meaningful life. In addition, Ilaitia Sevati Tuwere, one of the early contextual theologians of the South Pacific agrees by noting the importance of a relevant living theology that should be “grow in the native soil.”⁷⁹

Contextualization does not only explain the Christian way of living the gospel in the Tongan American congregation context but also brings Jesus closer to the Tongan consciousness by identifying Jesus himself with the people as a Tongan. Tevita Mohenoa Puloka, shares his “*Sisu Tonga*” theology by identifying Jesus as Tongan with brown skin and who grew up in Tonga.⁸⁰ Puloka hopes to open the eyes of the individual to experience God’s love in close relationship. Sione ‘Amanaki Havea claims, “instead of being foreign (the gospel), it should become local and indigenized and contextualized.”⁸¹ The theology of *Sisu Tonga* allows the Tongan people to see, smell, taste and touch Jesus in the Tongan context.

When contextualizing the gospel, the Tongan preacher must look at the culture, history, values, signs and traditions to illustrate the story of Jesus and explain the character of God. Mercy A. Oduyoye understands the role of the cultural context in “unwrapping and enriching of the meaning of the Gospel for us today. In fact, the best way to understand the Bible properly is to take both our own cultural context and that of

⁷⁸ John Wesley Zwomunondiita Kurewa, *Preaching and Cultural Identity: Proclaiming the Gospel in Africa* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 78.

⁷⁹ Ilaitia S. Tuwere, “What is Contextual Theology: A View from Oceania”, in *The Pacific Journal of Theology*, Series II, 27 (2002): 8.

⁸⁰ Dr. Mohenoa’s Puloka’s lecture at the First United Methodist Church of Honolulu on February 19, 2011.

⁸¹ Havea, in *Consultation on Pacific Theology*, 11.

the biblical texts seriously.”⁸²

The cultural context of the Tongan people is marked by celebrations and community gatherings that allow for sharing and caring for each other. Havea explains that the Pacific way of life that includes "the cooperation of the community, the inclusiveness of the extended family the sharing and caring for the old folks were characteristic of the Pacific people even before western individualism touched our shores."⁸³ The Tongan people cannot separate their culture from the gospel because culture enables them to live a meaningful life. In fact, Tongan cultural norms of four golden strands or *faa'i kavei koula* are enhanced by the gospel's message of the great commandment. Therefore, preachers must be diligent not just of Scripture but also of the culture into which they seek to proclaim the gospel so that the sermon truly engages the listener, creating a true meeting of meanings.⁸⁴

Leonora Tubbs Tisdale writes in her book, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art* that contextual preaching removes the “false stumbling blocks to the hearing of the gospel in the preacher’s proclamation.”⁸⁵ Tisdale explains that a stumbling block is an obstacle that hinders the listener from hearing the message to make a decision based on his or her understanding of the gospel. Apostle Paul talks about it, "For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Corinthians 1:22-24 RSV). Although the Tongan

⁸² Yeow Choo Lak, “Christianity in a Southeast-Asian Metropolis,” in *One Gospel, Many Cultures. Case Studies and Reflections on Cross-Cultural Theology*, ed. Mercy Amba Oduyoye and Hendrik M. Vroom (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008), 29.

⁸³ Havea, in *Consultation on Pacific Theology*, 13.

⁸⁴ Tisdale, 58.

⁸⁵ Tisdale, 34.

American congregation of Sun Valley United Methodist Church has been around for three decades in the United States, most members are still attached to their culture. Some of the Tongan cultural practices have become a stumbling block in understanding the truth of the gospel. For example, the *inasi* offering to the chiefs could be a stumbling block since the *inasi* offering encourages Tongans to honor the chief rather than honoring the living God. As a result, the cultural practice remains a challenge because it takes precedence over other teachings of the church.

In addition, there are times when the preacher uses folk stories, songs, music, poems, and proverbs to describe the text. The folk story becomes the message when the preacher fails to embody the gospel in a believable way for the Tongan culture and within the church's context. The Tongan people faithfully uphold their culture as part of their tradition and proudly share their identity as Tongan Christians who love God and honor the monarchy and chiefs. However, an over-emphasis on culture can lead to equating cultural ideas with the Gospel. Numeitolu writes, "Tongans are proud of their Christian heritage by saying, we are religious people."⁸⁶ The yielding of Tonga or *tukufonua* create in the Tongan mind the belief that Tongans are protected by God and the people of Tonga belong to God. In that mindset Tongans seem to regard their culture as a true expression of their faith and see themselves from the perspective of the people of Israel as God's chosen people. This belief encourages the Tongan people to live their lives by honoring their kings and monarch more than honoring God. This is an example of the stumbling blocks that are critical for the preacher who is doing contextual theology to recognize.⁸⁷ The preacher should make every effort to remove these stumbling blocks and attempt to

⁸⁶Heneli Taliai Numeitolu, "The State and the Church: The State of the Church in Tonga," PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh, 2007), 7.

⁸⁷Tisdale, 35.

communicate the gospel so that the listener can make a genuine decision after hearing the gospel.

Areas of Contextualization in Preaching

Preaching is an event where one encounters God and the life of the congregation is transformed and led to a stronger and deeper commitment to do God's work.⁸⁸

Preaching must demonstrate a deep empathy with the broken condition, the needs, and the human situation of those who listen, and proclaim the good news in ways that effectively address that broken condition.⁸⁹ For preaching to be contextualized the following three areas should be explored. They are: (i) exegesis of the congregation, (ii) exegesis of the biblical text, and (iii) exegesis of preaching. The exegesis or explanation of the text and the congregation give a clear understanding of the church's identity and context. Through the work of exegesis, these three methods are explored to further the understanding of contextualization of preaching within the Tongan American congregation.

Exegesis of the Congregational Context

If the preacher wants to bring hope and transformation to the congregation, he or she must know the congregation's situation. An exegesis of the congregation's identity, culture, ritual, and history helps the preacher to contextualize the text into context.

Every person is bound by cultures, traditions and experiences in which they interpret or understand the world based on the reality of the way they see and experience life.

Therefore, Kraft encourages the missionary to exegete culture in the light of his reality

⁸⁸ Wilson, 21.

⁸⁹ Tisdale, 57.

for a change in the direction of God's ideal or "transforming culture with God."⁹⁰

Contextualization of preaching begins with an exegesis of the congregation's context to discover the congregation's identity. Even though the preacher is involved and participates in the life of the church he or she must function as an outsider in order to observe the congregation's behavior for a better understanding of the church's identity. Therefore, the exegesis of the congregation's identity brings the old text into the context of the listeners for greater understanding. Tisdale writes that the congregation's identity may be understood through the congregation's age, race, sex, level of education, and where they live.⁹¹ The preacher can gather the members' demographic information and learn about their lifestyle to determine the type of listeners he or she is preaching the gospel to. The type of work the members are doing reflect their gifts and talents or experiences as well as educational level. The exegete or the preacher must be involved with the people in conversation, working, living, and worshipping. There are times that members of the congregation speak of their concerns, hurts, feelings, and blessings that the preacher needs to take note and understand the church's context. The preacher needs to know what is important for the members of the church and their interests in life. Having to know their background, religious interest, history, work, family situation, and life help the preacher in forming the sermon and how to contextualize the gospel into their lives.

Tisdale also suggests an exegesis of the congregation's rituals, symbols, language, music, and dances. The Tongan American Congregation has practices and rituals that not

⁹⁰ Charles Kraft, *Christianity in Culture* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979), 145, quoted in David J. Hesselgrave, *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally: An Introduction to Missionary Communication*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1991), 129.

⁹¹Tisdale, 58.

only provide sources for discovering their identity but also how they relate themselves to God. The Tongan American congregation's life is revolves around celebration, social and religious activities that best identify the culture of the congregation. Throughout those special celebrations and activities, members perform their traditional dances, music, songs as well as speeches that reflect Tongan's tradition of respect of status and hierarchical systems. There are symbols and gifts presented during these events on behalf of the family to the pastors, chief, and special guests. The forms of celebrations or symbols used during Holy Communion could identify the person of his or her status in the church. The preacher can observe how people sit in the church that indicates a person's status in the church. The costume and attire worn to different church events and activities reflect the beliefs and values of the members. For example, some Tongan people wear the traditional *ta'ovala* or Tongan mat around their waist to express their respect for God and each other.

An exegesis of the congregation may also include listening to their stories, history, values, music, and cultures. The congregation tends to share their stories of the past and present and vision for the future. The stories portray their lives, passions, and beliefs. There are ancient stories that parents love to share with their children and the traditions, as well as how those traditions have remained true to them today. The history of the kingdom of Tonga is one of the most interesting stories often shared by Tongan preachers to discover what the Gospel affirms about Tongan culture and values.

Kathy Black argues the importance to story of the congregation, so the preacher can articulate and explain the text into the context. The stories that are shared among the congregation, its history, and heritage help to identify the congregation's character,

worldview, and ethos. It is important for the preacher to listen to the stories, and also ask questions to clarify and know the deep meaning behind the stories.⁹² In the stories, the preacher can identify who are the pillars of the church, the heroes, and the characters of the church. There are also untold stories the preacher could detect by observing and being with the congregation in the way the people act, look, work, or worship. There is a sense of belonging, connection, and oneness that is derived from fellowship and worship together. There are other forms of language used in sermons to enrich the deep meanings of what needs to be said or shared with the church. The Tongan proverbs are often used from the pulpit to draw attention and provoke the listener's imaginations of the preached gospel.

The Sun Valley church sings hymns from the Tongan Hymnal and reads the Bible in the Tongan language from the Tongan translation. The forms of music and songs composed by the Tongan people in ancient years carry on the tune and message that many Tongan American congregations continue to share as part of their life stories and culture to identify with his or her values and interests in life. The type of songs and music the Tongan American congregation sings in worship on Sunday reflect their passion for singing and their love of music. The elderly people in the church or the first generation usually memorize many of the hymns and quote verses while sharing their witness or giving testimony to emphasize a point he or she is trying to convey. However, the preacher must observe the people in order to understand the life of the church.

Exegesis of Biblical Text

The second area of contextualization in preaching is the exegesis of the biblical

⁹² Kathy Black, *Culturally-Conscious Worship* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2000), 86.

text. Many preachers have learned how to do exegesis of the biblical passage before preaching as the way to be true to the Scriptures and bring it into the context of today's world. A good biblical exegesis is commanded in scripture. "Study [be diligent] to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needed not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). According to this verse, the exegete must handle the "Word of God" properly through diligent study of the Word and with prayer for the help of the Holy Spirit to interpret the Word. However, this project suggests interpreting the Biblical text from the perspective of the congregation. It is important to understand the situation and context of the people who wrote the bible and the contexts or audiences that are addressed; the life of the writer and the situation of the people or community that is reflected in each passage or book. For example, Paul wrote the letter to the Philippians while he was in prison. Paul encourages the church to be strong in their faith and trust in God and to continue to share with each other and to humble themselves (Philippians 2:3). The situation that Paul is experiencing in Rome is difficult but he continues to empower the church in order for them to keep their faith in God, even though he is going to die. The Tongan American congregation has experienced hardships and difficulties in life as they immigrated to America to find a place to call home. With a message of hope and encouragement from the preacher on Paul's letter the congregation may be strengthened in their faith and in God.

The second stage of exegesis involves interpreting scripture with a focus on culture. The preacher must read the Bible in its context to understand the historical background of the story, the context of the people such as the Jews, Pharisees, the Palestinians and other peoples to gain a greater perspective. As time passes, culture

changes, points of view change, language changes, therefore, we must guard against interpreting scripture, only through the lens of our current context and attempt to place scripture in its historical context. The exegete could also consider the geography, the customs, the current events, and even the politics and worldview of the time when a passage was written.

Moreover, there are different principles of exegesis that may help to explore features of the text. The first principle is reading for basic understanding that may begin with a word study. The exegete usually starts with the examination of a passage by defining the words in it. The exegete can also examine the syntax or the grammatical relationships of the words in the passage. The historical principle of interpretation focuses on the cultures and historical context, the geography, customs, current events and the politics of the time when the passage or story was written. The exegete can also examine a passage in relation to its immediate literary context; its wider context, and its larger context within the Bible. In teaching or preaching one can communicate meaning through the use of signs, symbols, arts, music and songs as metaphors. Paul uses the examples of nature, sea and crops to illustrate the gospel at Lystra (Acts 14). Jesus often teaches the gospel in the context of the listeners to shape the gospel message.(John 15).

In the Tongan context, the preachers use signs to address the congregation's faith and to trace the people of God throughout history. For instance, the Tongan people embrace the importance of community and value relationships. A sermon that talks about the Tongan arts in terms of short stories, poems, songs and that speak of the Tongan people's experiences and life of community and sharing will resonate with their experience. Puloka believes the Bible should be interpreted within a cultural context with

the communal values of the Tongan people.⁹³ Indeed, Puloka's theology of "*Sisu* (Jesus) *Tonga*" emerged from the idea of contextual theology in the Tongan context. Again, the exegesis of the biblical text allows the congregation to understand the gospel in the Tongan context and respond to the sermon based on the gospel's teaching reflected in the words, symbols, customs and culture of the hearers.

Exegesis of Preaching and Worship Context

The last area of contextualization of preaching is the preaching context, and more specifically, the approaches used in preaching. The contextualization of theology is imperative to the Tongan American congregation because it is the process of understanding the gospel in terms of the Tongan's culture and context. In the Tongan American congregation, preaching is central to worship and the gospel message is meant to give meaning and direction to people so people can live by the Christians teachings. Therefore, the preacher must find the best approaches to use in preaching that are appropriate in the Tongan church and situation. Preaching in the Tongan American congregation follows the lectionary through the year with limited flexibility of choosing other scriptures to preach on Sunday worship.

Although there are various types of preaching styles, this research focuses on two types that are appropriate to the Tongan context as well as very common within the Tongan church: Thematic or Topical preaching and Expository preaching. The thematic or topical preaching is when the preacher decides on the topic or theme based on the situation of the congregation's context and searches Scripture for biblical texts applicable

⁹³Pat Gee, article, *Star Advertiser*, February 19, 2011, reporting on Dr. Mohenoa's Puloka's lecture at the First United Methodist Church of Honolulu, February 19, 2011.

to the topic or theme.⁹⁴ The exegete or preacher usually does an exegesis of the church to know the situation then draws upon from the Biblical text. The preacher who chooses to use topical preaching is trying to interpret the topic from the Biblical text.⁹⁵ Thematic preaching can also begin with scripture where the preacher refers to a passage of Scripture and uses it to formulate a theme.

In the Tongan American congregation, the preacher usually picks a verse to focus on during the sermon and will then provide context for this text. Textual preaching usually takes the preacher's focus on the verse rather than considering the rest of the chapter or the context of the story or the book of the Bible. However, in the Tongan American congregation it is important for textual preaching to be based on an exegesis of text and congregation in order to be fully contextualized.

After being a preacher in the Tongan congregation for more than ten years, I have recognized that Tongan preaching is generally more interested in the topic or the theme to focus on their preaching, believing that the Tongan culture represents the essence of the biblical message in the Bible. Even though a sermon may be less exegetical, Tongan preachers tend to approve of a sermon that seems deeply spiritual with a message from the bible. In fact, the authentic preaching in the Tongan congregation is a sermon that is alive with Tongan culture, situation and history. The advantage of the topical preaching is that the preacher can help the congregation to examine an issue while searching for the Gospel perspective in the Scriptures. It also allows the preacher and the congregation to have a dialogue between the context and the text. This is what Tisdale calls the dance of interpretation, in which the preacher goes back and forth with Scripture while naming the

⁹⁴Ronald J Allen, ed., introduction to *Patterns of Preaching: A Sermon Sampler* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 1998), x.

⁹⁵Allen, introduction to *Patterns of Preaching*, x.

congregation's struggles, issues and situation.⁹⁶ Indeed, the topical preaching method allows the preacher to engage in contextual interpretation through exegesis of the congregation and the biblical text before preaching a sermon in the Tongan American congregation.

The second style of preaching is expository where the preacher takes the point of the text as the point of the sermon. Allen writes, "The purpose of the expository sermon is to help the congregation interpret its situation from the perspective of the gospel through the lens of a biblical passage or theme."⁹⁷ The Tongan American congregation context is appropriate for this style because the preacher seeks to connect the Word of God to congregation. They would often preach through a book of the Bible verse-by-verse, seeking to illuminate the words of the text to their congregation and apply the Scripture to their lives. The preacher seeks not only to interpret the texts but to apply and contextualize the message to answer the questions and concerns of the hearers. In my survey (Appendix A), 90% of the Tongan preachers expressed their preference for topical preaching and for the expository method. They found them helpful in designing a message that identified the issues, addressed the cultural contexts while sharing from the passages throughout the Bible.

In summary, I have discussed the theological understanding of contextualization and how it is used as process of interpreting the gospel into the context of the people or listeners. For preaching to be effective it must be contextualized for the Tongan American congregation in the celebration, social and religious activities of the Tongan people. The three areas of exegesis in contextualization of preaching are the context, the

⁹⁶ Tisdale, 93.

⁹⁷ Allen, introduction to *Patterns of Preaching*, x.

biblical text and preaching and worship context. Having to do so, the preacher can be faithful to the Scriptures while contextualizing the text effectively for the particular congregation. Contextual sermons can bridge the text and the context through the preacher who is familiar with both the text and context of the congregation. In the next chapter, the ideas discussed above will be applied to design and preach sermons in the Tongan American congregation of Sun Valley United Methodist Church to demonstrate how effective contextualization of preaching can be.

CHAPTER 4

CONTEXTUAL SERMONS PREACHED

This chapter presents three sermons that were designed using the contextualization of preaching method and preached at Tongan American congregation of Sun Valley United Methodist Church. The full text of the sermon is followed by an analysis that identifies the text, the focus verse, purpose, and goals of the sermon. There is also a discussion of the contextual elements of the sermon with the result of the survey taken before and after delivering of the sermon.

In the Tongan American congregation, the order of worship is already developed and has been the order to follow for so many years and people are accustomed to it. However, the time, and worship depends solely on the preacher or the pastor. There are certain rules that the preacher must follow, yet there is no restriction but to let the Holy Spirit lead the worship services. The songs and hymns are chosen by the preachers as well as prayers or litanies that are used the worship service. The preacher rises to give the sermon and must first take the time to introduce the theme, scripture, and focus verse for the sermon. It is a ritual for the preacher in the Tongan congregation to pay respect by recognizing the presence of the chief, and special church members, offer words of honor to the House of the Lord, and recognize all people who are attending the service before delivering the sermon. These are the traditional steps taken by the preacher before the preaching of the sermon to the congregation. There is no time limit in preaching, but the Tongan church expects a spiritual and biblical message that appropriate to the congregation's context.

Full Text of Sermon 1: “What Shall I Do To Inherit Eternal Life?”
Based on Mark 10:17-31

Introduction

I want to praise the Lord for the opportunity to preach this afternoon. First, I would like to share my *fakatapu* (reverence) to our Father in Heaven, His Son Jesus Christ and Holy Spirit. *Fakatapu* to the chief of our congregation, *Tevita Kefu Tu'itavake*. *Fakatapu* to *Kauatoa* and all the talking chiefs. *Fakatapu* to the lay leader and the rest of the church. I also want to pay my respect to all the visitors here with us today. I am always grateful for this opportunity to share God's Word with God's people.

The focus verse for the sermon is Mark 10: 17, "*And when he was gone forth into the way, there came one running, and kneeled to him, and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?*" The theme: What shall we do to inherit eternal life?

Our rich and significant history gives us the reason for boasting and the source of pride to identify Tonga, a *fonua lotu* or Christian kingdom. In the early 1800s, King Taufa'ahau Tupou I united all the Tongan islands, and freed all commoners from bondage to the chiefs and offered Tonga to God or *tukufonua*. The essence of *tukufonua* is reflected in the motto of Tonga, *Otua mo Tonga ko hoku tofi'a*, or “God and Tonga is my inheritance.” The *tukufonua* is not only our identity as Christians but also a covenant with God to serve Him who protects us. Indeed, the spirit of *tukufonua* still embedded in the Tongan people's heart no matter where we have lived, we are Christians, and we are God's people.

The story of a rich man is included in all the synoptic gospels. The story of the rich man is our story that reflected our life and our relationship with God. The rich

young man thought of himself as a good man who keeps all the law, a descendant of Abraham who belongs to the chosen people, and he is well respected as leader of the city. However, he recognized that he is missing something in life. When he saw Jesus, he was running toward him, humbly knelt before him and asked “*Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?*” The word *inherits* in Greek means to *possess* and *hold onto*. The rich man wants to know how he might own eternal life. They were thinking about working and doing something to get into the kingdom of God.

Tongans live with the thoughts that our *tukufonua* identified us with God and made us Christians. We proudly wave our flag with the cross to remind us that we are *fonua lotu*. We practice our Tonga culture believing it is the Christian way of living. The rich man’s question to Jesus is our question also to examine our lives what is missing? The young man declared in verse 20; “Teacher, all these things I have kept from my youth.” How often do you say that you have been a Christian all your life? How good you keep all the commandments and believe that we are Christians? Jesus is saying to the rich man that been faithful to the law of Moses is not enough. You need more than keeping the law, you need relationship with Jesus Christ.

STORY: There is a Tongan saying, “*foaki pe ke 'osi'osingamalie* or give until it hurts that speaks to our culture of giving and sharing. Last year, I attended one of our Tongans church *misinale*, the annual offering followed by our Tongan traditional feast or *kaipola*. It was a great celebration but to my surprise one of the non-Tongan clergy whispered into my year, “What is the driving force of doing this feast?? Before I explained, he continued, “Are the Tongans Christian?” What is the driving force of *misinale* and *kaipola*? The pastor was referring to the tables fill with so much food that cost a lot of money will go

into waste. Are we doing this for the sake of honoring God or for the sake of keeping our Tongan values and traditions? What is the purpose of doing such celebration and feast for our own recognition and our tradition? The young man's request was a simple question but Jesus' answer made him sad. Jesus says, "One thing you lack, Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." The rich man was upset because he had to give up his possessions and follow Jesus. The rich young man was sad because he needs to change his lifestyle and give up his traditions. Paul says to the Romans 8:5, "Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires." Jesus knew where the rich's heart, so he told him to give up his possessions. How hard is it for you to follow Jesus? Peter said in verse 27, "Look, we have left everything and followed you." In Peter's mind, he thought that having to let go of his family is part of getting the reward of eternal life. But Jesus said in verse 28, that anyone who has left his or her family for the sake of the gospel and face persecutions will definitely receive eternal life. The rich man wants to do work but Jesus wants faith. We may keep all the commandments and being a good person in the community and identify as church goers, yet, we are not worthy of the kingdom of heaven if we do not have a relationship with Jesus.

Our land and people were offered to God and our motto says, "*Otua mo Tonga ko hoku tofia*" but it does not make us a *fonua lotu* or Christian nation. When we decide to follow Jesus, and totally commit to the mission of God, our lives will change.

King Taufa'ahau accepted Christianity but really he was not willing to give up his power and his honor as the king of the kingdom. He still doubted the new religion,

Christianity. One day, he took Pita Vi, one of the earliest Tongan Christian and preacher on a voyage to *Ha'apai* to teach the people of this new religion called Christianity. On their way to *Ha'apai*, he wanted to test this new God against the power of the indigenous gods. During their voyage they were escorted by one of the ancient Tongan gods, a big fish. On this particular voyage, the white shark followed them. As they were sailing in the middle of the ocean with no land near, *King Taufa'ahau* declared: "*Pita Vi*, if the God you believe in and pray to be the true God, then the great shark will not hurt you. But if the god I pray is the true god, the white shark will devour you." *King Taufa'ahau* then commanded the crew to seize Pita and throw into the ocean. When the king landed the island, the chief, and his people welcomed him with a kava ceremony as part of the Tongan tradition. During the kava ceremony, Pita Vi appeared walking humbly toward the kava ceremony and seated by the kava bowl as Tonga customs. Pita then spoke, "Your majesty, I have fulfilled your command. I have done my sacred duty." *King Taufa'ahau* commanded all the people of Tonga to worship only the living God. *Our Tongan Hymn #391, verse 2, states this clearly,*

He ne tu'u ki ai 'a e lotu,	Christianity arrived,
Omi 'a e kau faifekau 'O	The missionaries came,
fanongo 'e he motu Ki he	and all the islands heard,
me'a 'a e Toputapu	the message of the Bible,
'O tafoki	and they all repented,
'a e hou'eiki mo e Hau	the chiefs and the monarchy

There is a Tongan proverb, "*Tonga mo'unga ki he loto*" or Tonga's mountain is in its heart. Rev. Dr. Moulton truly believed that the mountain or strength of the Tongan people is our heart or the willingness of the person. The heart of the Tongan is our strength, our will and our stronghold. When their heart is willing to do it, they will with all their strength and lives. If we are willing to give everything to our earthly king and

chiefs, how hard it is to give our lives to the one who gave His life for us? Let us not go away grieving like the rich man, but present your life as a living sacrifice to God. Jesus says in Matthew 6:33, “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” One of our hymns assured us,

*‘Ave ‘eku me’a lahi
To’o mo hoku ngaahi tapuaki
Ka toe pe ‘ae ‘Ofa ‘ae ‘Otua
He ‘ikai ha me’a ‘e mole*

If all my possessions are taken away and
every material blessing,
if God’s love remains with us,
then nothing is lost

When Jesus was preparing for his death, He said to his disciples, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their lives will lose it, but whoever loses their lives for me will find it. What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? “For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father’s glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done” (Matthew 16:24-37). How can I inherit eternal life? Amen.

Analysis of Sermon 1, Using Tongan Ethnic Identity, History and Proverbs or Sayings

The sermon was delivered in the Sun Valley United Methodist Congregation in the Tongan language on Sunday, June 24, 2012. There were 55 adults of first generation Tongan American congregation, 10 youth, and 8 children of second generation who do not speak but understand Tongan language. There were also four visitors from the Island of Tonga with us on this Sunday.

In contextualizing the context of the congregation, the preacher recognizes the cultures of the church in terms of the member’s title and rank. In the beginning of the sermon, the preacher proceeds with paying respect to the chief, acknowledging his

presence as part of the Tongan culture. If the preacher misses the *fakatapu*, it is difficult for the congregation to listen to the rest of the sermon because it is disrespectful in the introduction of the message.

The message of this sermon is to encourage the Tongan people to look further for what is important in life. We always consider ourselves to be a religious people of faith and spirituality. We are so proud to say that the king had given our people and land to God's protection. The preacher engages the text by exegesis that explores the historical background, identity, values and belief of the rich man to help the listeners understand his identity and his beliefs. This symbolic act or *tukufonua* became our identity that we took pride in that we belong to God, and we are Christians. The congregation celebrated *misinale* with big feast embodies the Tongan traditional ways of love offering or *inasi* to the chiefs to keep their relationship could be transformed into the way Christians supposed to offer to the poor in the honor of God. When we give everything to the *misinale* and share our gifts to honor the kings, chiefs, and clergy as reflection of our Tongan culture, we feel complete and it is an honor to give in the name of God. The preacher is trying to help the Tongan American congregation to recognize the importance of having a right relationship with God by sharing the history, stories and songs that they familiar, understood and experienced in their context. The preacher wants the congregation to see that faithful adherence to Tonga cultural practices as the core values of life will not provide a path to eternal life. Like the rich young ruler, the congregation needs to have a relationship with Jesus Christ that is based on faith, and trust in him and a willingness to follow Jesus Christ.

The survey indicates the importance of reflecting Tongan culture in the sermon so

that the sermon draws on the listener's context and makes it easier to understand the gospel message. The sermon hopes to help the listeners distinguish the Tongan culture from Christian teaching so that they may choose to live by the gospel, instead. The survey shows that 90% of the responses state that like to hear more of contextual sermon like this sermon in the Tongan churches (Appendix A). The conversation after the contextual sermon was preached affirmed that listeners could relate the rich man to their own Tongan cultural understandings (Appendix B).

Full Text of Sermon 2: "Unity in Christ"
Based on Philippians 2:1-10

Introduction

There is a Tongan saying, "*kafataha*" or one strand of *kafa*. The word came from how Tongans build the Tongan house. There are six posts that are held together by a sennit rope, called *kafa*; this is the nature of a strong building, where the lashings begin with the main posts called the *taufatunga* of the house. Every piece of lumber or beam is tied to the *taufatunga*, and when the lashing is done, only one strand of sennit rope or *kafa* is used. The first king of Tonga, George Tupou I unified the kingdom of Tonga with one strand of sennit cord that lashed the country together. It was the Christian faith that made it stronger on a solid foundation in Jesus Christ as the cornerstone. The king hoped that regardless of the ongoing global and economic changes or modern pressures, Tonga would remain *kafataha* or united under God's rule and protection.

Paul's Epistle was written to the church in Philippi where he is instructing to be united by having a loving relationship as one body of Christ. Paul is asking the church to work together with the mindset of Jesus Christ for the purpose of the church. In verse 2, Paul writes, "Working together with one heart and purpose." If we are united in Christ

or *Kafataha* 'ia *Kalaisi* as our Tongan saying, we will experience the joy of being a member of the body of Christ as well as being obedience to God's will and accomplished the purpose of the church. What is the purpose of the church? Based on our United Methodist church mission statement, we are called to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. However I have discovered that some Christians don't know how to unite because they enjoy arguing and division. I have discovered that the church people arguing about a lot of things that are not essential to our salvation. Paul is urging the church in Phillip to strengthen their relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ by working together in unity. In fact, I want to stand with you in one spirit and make every effort to keep the unity that the Spirit created so that we are like-minded, having the same love and being one in spirit with the mindset of our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul says, "If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion (2:1). The word "if" could be translated "since". Since you have encouragement, comfort, love, fellowship, tenderness, and compassion in Christ – let it spill over into your relationship with your brothers and sisters.

One of the reasons people are divided is because they don't have an intimate relationship with Jesus. You can't give what you don't have. You can't share what you've never experienced. The relationship Jesus has with us is always the model for how we are to relate to other people and united as the body. Jesus said to his disciples, "Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples" (John 13:35). Paul knew that in order for the church to accomplish its purpose, love one another and enjoy life, the church must *kafataha* or unite and work together. The church

is not made up of disconnected people but one church. In Ephesians 4:4, Paul says, "We are all one body." The body may have many members who function differently but they all make up one body. Paul knew that the Christians in the church in Philippi were disconnected. Some of the members are not helping and working with each other, but instead they were hurting and arguing with each other. So Paul encouraged them: "*In your relationships with one another, has the same mindset as Christ Jesus*" (Phil 2:5 NIV).

What Apostle Paul is trying to convey to the church is similar to our Tongan culture of *faa'i kaveikoula* or four golden strands that define the element of the Tongan relationship with each other. The *fa'ai kaveikoula* consists how we live our life with respect, sharing, self-sacrifice and love that unite our Tongan people here in the Valley as one community. These are the virtues and values that are embedded in our way of life. They are the basis of our relationship with God, the royals, and the chiefs, and with each other.

In order for the church to enjoy unity and accomplish our called to ministry, we must first show respect and value each other. Paul is telling the church to, "*Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteems others better than himself*" (Philippians 2:3 (NKJV)). Too often we compete with people who are our brothers and sisters in the body of Christ. To have a relationship and mindset of Christ, we need to *faka'apa'apa* or show respect for one another's feelings and be willing to listen to one another even though you we may not agree with them. For the Christian, the question should not be, "How can this benefit me?" but "How can this benefit the Kingdom of God?" President Kennedy once said, "Ask not what your country can do for

you, but what you can do for your country." If this is true of something like an earthly political establishment, how much more true it should be of Christians and the Kingdom of God? We need to spend less time thinking of what God and what the Church can offer us, and spend more time asking God what we can do for him and his Church, and we can do that with willingness to listen with respect to one another.

Second, Paul encourages the church to humble themselves by saying, "Do nothing out of rivalry or conceit, but in humility consider others as more important than yourselves" (Phil. 2:3 NIV). When Captain Cook visited the island of Tonga in 1777, he noticed the people's hospitality and how welcoming the people were as he gave Tonga the name, "Friendly Islands or *Otu Motu 'Anga 'ofa* because of the love they have for each other. Captain Cook always shared how peaceful the islands were with no wars because the people share and help one another or *'anga 'ofa* that marks the *faa 'i kaveikoula* of the *anga fakatonga*. There is a Tongan saying that we are one island, or *koe famili pe kitautolu 'e taha*. Many of us here live with our extended family and support each other. The purpose of the church is to care and love one another. We are a community of faith and people who belong to each other as one family.

Thirdly, Paul is asking the church to live in unity by "not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the other (verse 4)." Paul's suggestion complemented the third strand of the *faa 'i kavei koula* of "*mo'ui mateaki*" or self-sacrifice. Jesus taught us to be loyal, dedicated, and devoted in our lives to God by sacrificing our needs and giving our lives for others. We are one body with many members, but we must put on the mind of Christ in our worship, fellowship, sharing, living, and serving. When we humble ourselves, our focus is not on us but on other

people. The book of Proverbs 29:23 tells us, “A man’s pride will bring him low, but the humble in spirit will retain honor.” Paul reminded the church that Jesus humbled himself to become servant and God raised him up to the glory of God (verse 7-9). This is our call as members of Christ’s body. James 4:10 says, "Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up." The mind of one who humbled Himself for others and became obedient to the Father’s will, even to the point of death on the cross. What death? Death of the cross. The Apostle John says it like this, “By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren” (1 John 3:16; NKJV). When we humble ourselves, our focus is not on us but on other people.” Paul reminded the church that Jesus humbled himself to become servant and God raised him up to the glory of God (verse 7-9). James also says in 4:10, "Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up." This is our call as members of Christ’s body.

Let me close with the familiar story of when Christianity first arrived to Tonga. In late 1800s, a group of Tongan Christians were forced to move to Fiji because they refused to follow the direction of the *Tu’i Tonga* (monarchy). The day they were leaving the harbor, Dr. Moulton, stood by the shore with some of the Tongan missionaries and they said their farewell with tears and sang Hymn #399:

“Kainga toki lotu e, ‘Oua na’a fiu
 Puke ho’omou lotu pe, ‘Oua na’a fiu.
 Ka mou vili atu pe, ‘Oua na’a fiu,
 Oka teu ‘ae fonise, Moe fanga laione,
 Koe tokolahi fau, ‘Oua na’a fiu,

Christians, Do not give up
 Keep on, do not give up
 ‘Even the fire. and den of lion
 Stand firm in Lord...do not give up
 Despite of the crowd, do not give up

When they had finished singing, a voice came out from the ship, “*Oua na’a fiu* (do not give up). These people left the island and became the pioneers of spreading the gospel in Fiji that converted many of the Fijian people to Christianity. We are called to make

disciples and transformed the world but we must unite in Christ. To enjoy unity you've got to let your faith rest fully on the Lord Jesus Christ. Not on non-essential issues, but on Christ alone. Then, adopt the humble attitude of Jesus. Like Jesus, humble yourself before the Lord and he will lift you up. Consider others better than yourself. Stop arguing for your rights and focus on your responsibilities to love others and maintain the unity of the Spirit. Let the attitude of Jesus dominate your thought life and your behavior will naturally follow. That is our Tongan way of life, our culture, the *fa'ai kavei koula* that we value so much in our relationship with God and with each other, Unity in Christ for the sake of our church's mission and the will of God. Amen.

Analysis of Sermon 2, Using Tongan Cultures, Values and Songs

This sermon was delivered on World Communion Sunday for both Knollwood (English language) and Sun Valley UMC to encourage the two congregations to unite in Christ and work together to accomplish God's purpose. Our congregations are sharing the facility with the vision to merge as one church so they can serve the Lord and in ministry together. However, there are some arguments and disagreements that became the obstacles in the merging process as well as impacting the ministry of the church. Despite of the conflicts we experienced, if we put on the mind of Jesus Christ who humbled himself to die on the cross for us, we have hoped to live with respect, care, and love for one another.

Having to utilize the language and common knowledge of the Tongan cultures *of anga fakatonga* makes the biblical text as comprehensible as possible. The listeners can use their cultural knowledge to better understand the life of the church in Philippi that Paul is trying to bring them joy and peace if they live in unity or *kafataha* in Christ. The

four golden strands or *faa'i kavei koula* of respect, sharing, sacrificial love and relationship is appropriate to use as conditioned of understanding the text for the context. In fact, the virtues of the Tongan way of life does makes sense and relevant to the hearer's way of life as they experienced in their relationship with each other in the family, community and the church. Paul is trying to bring the church together to a relationship of love and work together as essential to their salvation and for the sake of the church's purpose. The Tongan saying, "*kafataha*" of how the Tongan build the Tongan house also used as metaphor to bring out the idea behind the message that Paul is trying to urge the church in Phillipi. There are some stories and examples that offered throughout the sermon to help communicate the message and convey the biblical truth to the congregations. In addition, the hymns and songs integrate into the sermon for better understanding of the message as part of the Tongan way of contextualization of preaching and spirituality. The Tongan hymn was composed by Dr. Moulton based on the Bible also affirm the biblical truth validated the message in the Tongan congregation.

Full Text of Sermon 3: "To be the Greatest is to be a Servant"
Based on Mark 10:35-45

Introduction

Our kingdom is a monarchy kingdom. Our social system identified our status, rank and responsibilities in the society. We all know where we came from and who we are in the hierarchy system. Here in our church, we honor our *hou'eiki* and recognize his chiefly blood and rank. There will never be a time when the commoners become the chief unless the commoner is offered a title to be the chief's *matapule* or spokesperson that brings one into a higher position within the community and the rest of the commoners or people. In today's story from the gospel, the two brothers, John, and James came to

Jesus, asking him to give them a title, a place in his kingdom where John is seated at the right side and James could be in the left side. In the gospel of Matthew, they sent their mother, Salome to ask Jesus to allow them to sit in these prominent positions in this future kingdom Jesus was going to establish. John and James belong to Jesus “inner circle” that also includes Peter. These disciples are especially intimate with Christ. They alone were present for the healing of Jairus’ daughter (5:37) and for the Transfiguration when Jesus was glorified (9:2). James and John are also called “the sons of thunder” (3:17). These brothers have fiery personalities and zeal for the Lord. This leads them to ask a rather presumptuous question: “Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask of You.” Several times my daughter, Mele has asked me, “Mommy, will you promise to do whatever I ask?” In other words, Mele wants some degree of confidence that I will say “yes” to whatever she asks me. Since Jesus is wise and shrewd, He asks James and John, “What do you want Me to do for you?” (10:36). The brothers reply, “Grant that we may sit, one on Your right and one on Your left, in Your glory” (10:37). The word “grant” (dos) is an imperative verb of command, not a request. In other words, these brothers are audaciously commanding Jesus for a seat of authority. James and John believed that Jesus was the Messiah, and they thought He was likely going to establish His kingdom when they reached Jerusalem. These brothers wanted the positions of highest honor. In 10:38a, Jesus replies to the brothers, “You do not know what you are asking.” Most of us pray this way, don’t we? We like to tell Jesus what to do. However, it is critical to note that Jesus doesn’t rebuke James and John for being ambitious, nor does He reject them for having such desire. He is pleased that they desire kingdom greatness. However, Jesus wants to explain that biblical ambition needs to be transformed into a humility directed

toward serving others rather than a proud serving of self. He wants these brothers to understand the need to climb down the ladder to greatness. So Jesus warns them of what will be involved in their quest for kingdom greatness. In 10:38b, He explains that greatness always involves suffering. Jesus asks, “Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?” Once a title is given to the *matapule*, the Tongan community gathers to celebrate at a traditional *kava* ceremony or circle of sovereignty to affirm the title and the *matapule*’s responsibility. The kava cup is given to the *matapule* to drink to affirm his title with the complete trust of the King of Tonga, the chiefs and the community with great hope that *matapule* will hold true to his sacred duty bestowed upon him. The *matapule* drinks the cup as a sign of his covenant with the king and the chief to be their servant. The cup that Jesus was talking about was a cup of bearing the cross and facing the threat of death. We are not going to take the easy way out to earn the glory of God. We must carry the cross and bear all the circumstances for what we have done. Jesus is asking these two brothers if they can suffer the same type of suffering that He is preparing to enter into. In other words, Jesus asks James and John if they can handle the cross. Yet, James and John didn’t ask to be on the cross, but to wear the crowns on His right and left. They wanted recognition, not crucifixion. Yet, the disciples need to concentrate on present service rather than future honor.

Being a follower of Christ is a cross bearer, a true servant is someone who surrender to God and is willing for God to take over one’s life. Jesus knew the purpose of their request and said to them you do not know what you are saying. If you want to be first in my kingdom, you must become a servant, to be the greatest, you must serve others.

If you want to be great and powerful and be in a high standing in my kingdom, you must be a servant, a slave to all. If you want to go through what I am about to go through, you must serve instead of being served. As you heard in verse 41, the rest of the disciples were also upset because they wanted the power and position that James and John had requested. This could easily happen to all of us, especially being a Tongan in a hierarchical system that many times we always wanted the place of honor and position of power. We sometimes find a way to claim we have a *konga 'eiki* or chiefly blood that we think we are higher than others, and then to exercise power over others. Jesus tells his disciples that they are not like the leaders of the Gentiles or the rulers of other nations who hold their high official status and are served. Jesus says, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

Story: I love the story was told of Queen Salote's humility and servant leader when she visited London to attend the coronation ceremony of Queen Elizabeth II. On the day of the coronation, monarchy from around the world, and hundreds of thousands of people lined up to see the parade. It was a wet and rainy day, and the royal carriages covered for the protection but not *Queen Salote's* carriage. She refused to cover up, explaining that if the people could get wet in honor of the Queen of England, so could she.

Queen Salote's humility captured the hearts of the people of the world that were at the ceremony on that day. Before James and John place their request before Jesus, he tells them exactly what he is about to do. Mark 10:33-34, "For the son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." This is the greatest example of a being the greatest and true servant leader the world has ever known.

All Christians called to the difficult task of putting the needs of others above their

own needs. As leaders, we must set the example for the rest of the people. Many times, I do not feel comfortable when you have me sit at the front table and to be served while others are standing in line to get their food. I know this is part of our tradition but I rather stand in line with the rest of you for I am called to set the example of being a servant. Jesus became a servant and shows his disciples by taking the basin and the towel on the night of their last supper. Jesus leads the way and demonstrates what it means to serve instead of being served. Our Tongan culture put us in a position that we felt a little unequal in the society, in the church or in the family. In the church, we experience the overdue respect and differences among the members and the *hou'eiki* in our setting. Jesus said, no matter if we have title, position, power, or authority, those who are willing to serve are the ones who will receive the glory in heaven. Who ever wanted to be the greatest, must become a servant.

Who would think that King George Tupou I would surrender to anyone for he was the king and authority of the Tongan islands? He won all the battles and unified the kingdoms of Tonga under his authority and power. When Christianity was introduced, King George Tupou I accepted and converted to Christianity. He commanded the destruction of destroy all the Tongan indigenous gods and idols. He gathered the people in *Pouono, Vava'u*, and offered his people and land to God, saying, *"I, George make known to all chiefs of every rank and region and to all my people. May you have happiness and satisfaction for there is a God of heaven and earth. I declare to all of you He is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He is able to do anything that pleases him. We are all under the protection of His hands, we are the sheep of his fold, and his sacred pleasure is the cause of our greatest happiness."* After that he knelt down and he took up

a handful of soil and cast it into the air and that was his act of conveying the land to God. He prayed, “*God, our Father, I offer unto you my land and my people and those who follow after me, I offer them to be protected from heaven.*” King George Tupou I, knelt down before God as a sign of surrender of his power, his influence, and his life to the living God. Our earthly king surrendered his power and life to God following his example of God’s only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, and Savior. He gave his life for all of us. If you want to be the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven, you must become a servant. The promise affirmed by the opening hymn we sang today, “Hymn #468, verse 5, “We will bless you, and your family, and many more years to live from generation to generation. (*‘E tupu pe ‘ae monu’ia, ‘iha potu teke ‘au kiai, hange a ngoue uheina, ‘o lahi hono tapuaki*). Amen.

Analysis of Sermon 3, Using Hierarchical System, Traditions, Stories and Hymns

This sermon preached on Sunday, October 21, 2012, at Sun Valley United Methodist Church. Today we are celebrating Laity Sunday, and the message taken from the gospel of Jesus Christ in Mark 10:35-45. The purpose of this sermon is to encourage the church members to understand their role as service. In order for one to become a leader and has the power and title, one must become a servant like Jesus. The using of the hierarchical system and sharing the history, and retelling short stories ground the sermon in context from the beginning. Without extensive exegesis of the biblical text, I allow the history and stories to paint the picture of what the biblical text is saying to them. This approach help the congregation imagine how the church distinguished its members from each other as part of the Tongan culture. The hierarchical system defines the status and rank of the Tongan with each other and used as comparable to Jesus teaching of

honoring God as honoring the chiefs. The concerns for Sun Valley UMC that many of the leaders are only taking the title and position without taking responsibilities of being in ministry. It seemed to me that the leaders of the church are not willing to serve rather than to be served. The Tongan society is hierarchical and the basis for distinguishing one from another. Some members always spoke of their chiefly title, and they are higher than others so they should be treated differently from the rest of the church members. Sun Valley is a very conservative and traditional church, and culture is a big part of our worship, programs, and activities. When we celebrate special Sundays, the church recognizes those in the chiefly lineage, the *matapule*, and those who have chiefly blood. The rest of the members must give those gifts in terms of Tongan tapas, mats, or money for their presence. When the prince or monarchy visits our church, the members must decorate the church and present those gifts and visit their homes and perform a special prayer. Therefore, the message of this passage helps the members of the church to know that Jesus calls all people to become a servant. Despite of our Tongan hierarchy, we are all equal in the body of Christ and all called to be servants. The short stories were shared in the sermon to help the listeners to connect the biblical text with the stories of the Tongan people's faith and how the Tongan practices the spirituality. The story of the Queen is one of the well known stories in the Tongan context that explain that all people are God's servant. The stories about missionaries point to the commitment and servant hood that is required out of all people in the midst of danger and pain. By addressing the problem, everyone must become a servant, for Jesus came to serve by giving his life for all of us. All the rulers and high officials must serve to be considered the greatest among us. The closing of the sermon with a Tongan hymn is one of the Tongan traditional ways

of ending the sermon with interpretation of the message with the listener's spirituality of the Tongan hymn. The short stories and the hierarchy system embody in the sermon is appropriate with the biblical text and the context of the listeners. Therefore, I hope that this sermon encouraged the Sun Valley congregation to take responsible for their call to ministry as God's will, rather than seeing oneself as different from one another. In fact every person is a child of God and we are all servants of God. Again, the survey (*Appendix A*), reflects how the listeners of the Tongan church enjoy listening to a contextual sermon that help them relate to the scripture through illustrations drawn from Tongan culture.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This project was written to help the preacher in the Tongan American congregation to be more effective, responsive and relevant when using the contextual approach to share the gospel. Tongans have been living in the United States for more than three decades but their understanding of the gospel is rooted in the Tongan culture and practices; their faith in the church is based on their understanding of the Tongan traditions, history, culture and way of life. However, Christianity is their identity and the gospel is the center of their faith that must be distinguished from the Tongan culture that they have embraced in their social and religious practices. By doing so, the preaching of the gospel must be relevant to the context of the Tongan people, whose lives resonate with church and celebration shaped by the Tongan culture and traditions.

In chapter two, I have presented the richness and wealth of the Tongan culture as the Tongan way of life that I have believed to be in harmony with the Christian teaching. The Tongan people value families, relationships, a socially hierarchical system, and respect for the monarchy and the chief-these identify the people as true Tongans.⁹⁸ Therefore, preaching needs to be more authentic and contextual when it relates to these cultures and values of the people. Although there are different approaches to preaching the gospel in the Tongan American congregation, I recognize the importance of the church where the Tongan people practice and celebrate their faith in the Tongan culture. In fact, preaching is the heart of the worship and church fellowship and programs are where the Tongans express their love for God.

⁹⁸Latukefu, 9.

In presenting the history of Christianity in Tonga, I showed that the Tongans did not grasp the gospel because the London missionaries brought the influence of the Western cultures while sharing the gospel in the Tongan land.⁹⁹ As a result, the Tongans remained true to their way of life and perceived the Tongan culture as the perfect way of expressing their love for the living God. The Tongan people understand God through the Tongan culture in the way they celebrate and live their lives in relationship with the monarchy and the chiefs. Latukefu referenced the *inasi* or love offering of the people to the monarchy and the chief to the biblical meaning of Jesus' sacrificial offering of his body on the cross for humankind.¹⁰⁰ In this interpretation of the culture, in the light of understanding the gospel, it is often difficult for some Tongans to recognize and distinguish what is the biblical truth from the Tongan culture. Therefore, this project addresses this issue by suggesting the contextualization of preaching the gospel in the Tongan American congregation. This method helps the first generation Tongan American to integrate their understanding of their culture and the Christian belief. Moreover, the contextualization of the preaching approach enables the Tongan American congregation to hear the gospel and make a decision as they respond to the gospel and Christian teaching in Tongan language, stories and images.

Preaching is to transform one's life and to bring all people to God.¹⁰¹ Mark writes, "Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news'" (Mark 1:14-15). If the preacher wants the sermon to be heard by the Tongan people in

⁹⁹Latukefu, 10.

¹⁰⁰Latukefu, 9.

¹⁰¹William H. Willimon, *Pastor: The Theology and Practice of Ordained Ministry* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 239.

the Tongan church, he or she must consider everything from sermon preparation to delivering of the sermon. Tisdale claims, “Christian preaching is an integrative and constructive endeavor, requiring creativity, imagination, and tough, disciplined thinking by those who undertake it on a weekly basis.”¹⁰² Chapter three discussed how to use the contextual approach in preaching the gospel in the Tongan church. Preaching is the heart of worship in the Tongan American congregation. Through exegesis of the congregational context, biblical text and preaching context, the preacher can contextualize the sermon for clear understanding of the gospel in the Tongan American congregation. In an exegesis of the context of the church, the preacher is required to pay attention to the Tongan culture, values, traditions, Christian history, symbols, and signs of its corporate life. The preacher also exegetes a biblical text for its context, time, place, culture and situation to understand the purpose and reason of writing the text and its reflection on God before interpreting the text into the Tongan American congregation context. The preacher is one who is able to learn about the life of the people, the context of the church, the Christian worldview and the biblical text to best fit the context of the congregation. The preacher needs to think theologically about the life of the people in the church, the issues they face, the celebrations, the life of the community, and congregational life as a whole. Through these issues and congregational life, the preacher can bring them together with the biblical text and preach to the congregation that is fitted to the context of the people who listen to the sermon. By using the contextualization method, the Tongan congregation shows respect to the situation as a Christian and responds to the sermon with love and peace.

¹⁰² Tisdale, 91.

The defining of the meaning of contextualization of preaching and the research on how to contextualize the gospel in this project confirms that the contextualization method is the most effective and meaningful way of proclaiming the gospel in the Tongan American congregation. When the preacher contextualizes the gospel by invoking the Tongan culture and *anga fakatonga*, the preaching is relevant to the congregation for a better response. The survey shows that more than 70% of the respondents preferred hearing the gospel not only in the Tongan language but also contextualize the message by retelling the historical stories and cultures of the people (Appendix A). If the preacher wants to make the gospel transform one's life to respond to God's call, contextualization of preaching must be used to connect the listeners to the text that was written many centuries ago. In fact, the response to the first sermon shows 80% of the listeners understood the sermon because of the Tongan stories and music used to help them imagine the meaning of the biblical text (Appendix B). With contextualization of preaching, the preacher addresses the people's concerns and issues as well as reflecting on the Tongan customs and traditions in the sermon make the sermon more meaningful and understanding in the Tongan context. The congregation is able to connect to the biblical text when the preacher shares the story, songs and history that has been part of their identity and culture where the Tongans find meaning in their life.

The method of contextualization of preaching the gospel in the Tongan American congregation allows preaching to bring their life and the biblical text into the context of the people in the church. The contextual preaching acknowledges and embodies the Tongan culture and traditions while maintaining the truth of the Scriptures through effective preaching of the gospel to the particular context of the Tongan people.

Through contextualization of preaching, the preacher is harmonizing the sermon on the biblical text and its context with the context of the Tongan people through preaching. The most important thing for the listeners when listening to the sermon is being able to stay focus and having to engage with the preacher from the beginning to the end of the sermon (Appendix B). The contextualizing of preaching enables the 10 preachers who evaluate the first sermon to understand the text in their own context and willing to respond to the message by changing their behavior and attitude about serving and following Christ. However, the second generation Tongan American youth and children with limited knowledge of the Tongan cultures and language may not understand the sermon. In fact, about 20% of the preachers who took the second survey believe that contextualization of the gospel and preaching the sermon in the Tongan language is less meaningful to our children. Therefore, this research suggests the possibility to expand this project to include how to contextualize the text biblical and communicate into a multi-culture and diverse context. Jeter and Allen speak more on this subject in their book, *One Gospel, Many Ears*, of how to preach to different listeners in the congregation of the same message.¹⁰³ Jeter and Allen share different approaches to communicating the gospel with every listener of different types with the understanding that every congregation is unique.

The chapter three discussed the integration of the methods and approaches by developing three sermons. The first sermon addresses the issues of the Tongan American congregation who believe that the Tongan culture is harmonized with the Christian teaching. The preacher uses the Tongan history of *tukufonua* that identifies the Tongans

¹⁰³ Jeter and Allen, 15.

as a religious people and the practice of faith in church of the annual tithing or *misinale* as metaphors to compare and contrast with the biblical teaching of how to inherit the eternal life. God wants a total commitment and relationship with Jesus Christ. The second sermon emphasizes the issues by naming the problems and concerns the people are facing in the church. Using the Tongan signs and symbols of *kafataha* illustrates the biblical truth in the mind of the Tongan people who know the significance of the Tongan history. The Tongan culture is also embodied in this sermon to lead the listeners to understand how to live in unity and relationship with each other as church members similar to the Tongan way of life or *anga fakatonga*. The four golden strands or *fa'ai kavei koula* of respect has a biblical meaning and significance to Paul's words of encouragement to the church in Philippi to be united in Christ. The third sermon uses the hierarchy system to illustrate that the Tongan culture has its own limitation and restriction as compared to God's relationship with His people. The sermon instills the importance of equality of all people in God's eyes and serving God is our responsibility rather than an obligation. Despite the Tongan form of a monarchy system that differentiates the people of Tonga, God loves all the people and calls them the children of God. Therefore, we are all servants of God. Moreover, these three sermons have demonstrated the Tongan customs, values, stories, thoughts, hymns and songs, language, signs and symbols for better interpretation of the gospel into the Tongan context. A survey also included in this research helps validate the project's goals of finding contextualization of preaching in the Tongan American congregation as the most effective way of sharing the gospel.

However, this project acknowledges the limitation placed on the research for the Tongan American congregation in the context of Sun Valley United Methodist Church, I

am convinced that this project could also help the preachers in the Korean, Latino, African-American congregation or any other context. The process of contextualization is not exclusively for one context but was introduced by the Third World theologians to help communicate the gospel in any context. When the preacher is able to exegesis the congregation and its cultures, identifying the biblical text and effectively communicate it to the congregation, the gospel may well be received with the possibility of transforming one's life with the mysterious work of the Holy Spirit in them. For example, the preacher in the Korean congregation can look into the context of the church in the lens of the traditional Korean religions, the cultures, symbols, values, identity and context of worship and contextualize the gospel into the context. Like the Tongan congregation, the Korean stresses the importance of praying and spirituality. Jung Young Lee shares, "One of the most distinctive characteristics of the Korean congregation is its prayer life. The Korean people have learned that prayers are part of life."¹⁰⁴ Koreans believe that the spirit is everywhere and they can pray everywhere they go. So when the Korean preacher contextualizes the gospel, one must recognize the power of prayers and spirit that the Koreans understand and value in preaching and worship. There are similarities of how to contextualization of preaching the biblical text and there are differences based on the context of the congregation. For example, the sermon that talks about cross and serving God could identify with the Korean and the African American congregation because the people have experienced suffering in their life. On the other hand, the Tongans with the ranking system are having difficulties to relate to the biblical text to become a servant rather than being served. Despite of the contexts and cultures, it is the preacher's responsibility to exegesis the congregation, the biblical text and context for the preaching

¹⁰⁴ Jung Young Lee, *Korean Preaching: An Interpretation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 48-49.

to be meaningful, understanding and transformational to the listeners. So what has been explained in this project to the preacher in the Tongan American congregation holds true for the preacher who wishes to preach in a multicultural or cross-culturally congregations. Stephen B. Bevans once asks the question “Is one model of contextual theology better than the other.”¹⁰⁵ From my research, I have recognized the wide range of methodologies that could be used for contextualization of preaching. The preachers and theologians are not only limited to one model or method. There are models that could be function well within certain sets of circumstances and specific situations or context while other models may not be necessary. Every culture has its own issues and context that needed to be addressed by the gospel. The gospel has no cultural boundaries and any cultures can receive the gospel for Jesus Christ came and died for the world. Paul witnesses that truth in Ephesians 2:13-15,

But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace...

Moreover, the two surveys were taken validated the method of contextualization and how to contextualization of preaching the gospel in the Tongan American congregations could also be the stepping stone to affirm with another preacher or pastor who is of different ethnic on how to contextualize sermons in their own context.

Lastly, while the focus of this project is inclusively for the Tongan American congregation only, the research could be expanded into further study. The project

¹⁰⁵ Bevans, 139.

suggests considering the preacher's subculture that influences the preaching of the gospel. In addition to the exegesis of the text, context and preaching, the preacher's beliefs, values and assumptions, within the environment and surrounding cultures, influences his or her contextual preaching. Tisdale talks about the importance of the preacher as "ethnographer or being skilled in observing and in thickly describing the subcultural signs and symbols of the congregations they serve."¹⁰⁶ Although the preacher may rely on the work of the Holy Spirit to help with sermon preparation and the exegesis of the text and context, the contextualization of preaching is all depends on the biblical text and the context.

¹⁰⁶Tisdale, 60.

SURVEY

APPENDIX A

Hello and Malo e lelei,

Please complete this survey for the purpose of my research at Claremont School of Theology for my Doctor in Ministry Thesis on "Contextualization of Preaching in the Tongan American Congregation." After completing of the survey, please return to me or call me for pick up before the end of the conference. Thank you. Kalesita Tu'ifua: Sun Valley United Methodist Church & Knollwood United Methodist Church. 818-284-3495.

Questions: Please answer for the best of your knowledge.

1. Are you a preacher? Yes or No: _____
2. How would you identify yourself? Please circle your Tongan-American generation? _____ 1st _____ 1.5 _____ 2nd
3. How would you describe the Tongan church that you preach to? (Please answer in percentages)
1st generation Tongan American: _____ %
1.5 generation Tongan American: _____ %
2nd generation Tongan American : _____ %
4. Why did you move to the United States and how long you have been here in the U.S?
5. How many people attend church on Sunday worship? _____
6. What language is used to communicate in the church in terms of:
Worship: _____ Preaching: _____
Sunday School: _____ Fellowship/Programs: _____
7. What kind of Tongan traditional activities does your church participate in? (*check all that apply*): _____ Misinale (Annual Tithing) _____ Kava party _____ Concert _____ Wedding _____ Funeral _____ Birthday Celebration _____ Others _____
8. How many worship services including Sundays during the week? _____
9. Do the first generation worship together with the second and third generation Tongan American members of the church? Yes or No: _____
10. If you are a preacher, what aspects of Tongan culture are present in your preaching or used in your sermon? (*check all that apply*)

Tongan stories: _____ Tongan experiences: _____ Tongan songs/hymns: _____
 Tongan history: _____ Tongan family tradition: _____ Tongan food/drink: _____
 Tongan sayings/proverbs: _____ Tongan news: _____ Tongan politics: _____
 Tonga games/sports: _____ Tongan dance: _____ Tongan values: _____
 Other: _____

11. What percentage of your church include our Tongan cultures and traditions as part of the worship, preaching and programs? >10% _____ =<50% _____
 <80%: _____ 100% _____ Other: _____%

12. Do you still recognize the monarchy and the chiefs:
 In your church Yes or No: _____ In Preaching? Yes or No: _____

13. What should preachers know about Tongans if their preaching is to be effective in a Tongan American church? Or how would you describe the preaching style of effective preaching in the Tongan context or Tongan American preachers?

14. As a listener in the Tongan American congregation, what is your concern (or recommendation) for the preacher to be more effective in your Tongan church context?

15. Any other suggestions to help our Tongan preachers to contextualize the proclamation of the gospel in our Tongan American churches?

16. What do you prefer in the sermon or what kind of preaching do you like to hear?
(check all that apply)

_____ Biblical _____ Topical _____ Thematic _____ Expository
 _____ Verse by Verse _____ Issues and Concerns _____ Historical
 Sermon _____ Textual _____ Doctrine _____ Spirituality
 _____ Evangelism _____ Contextual _____ Other

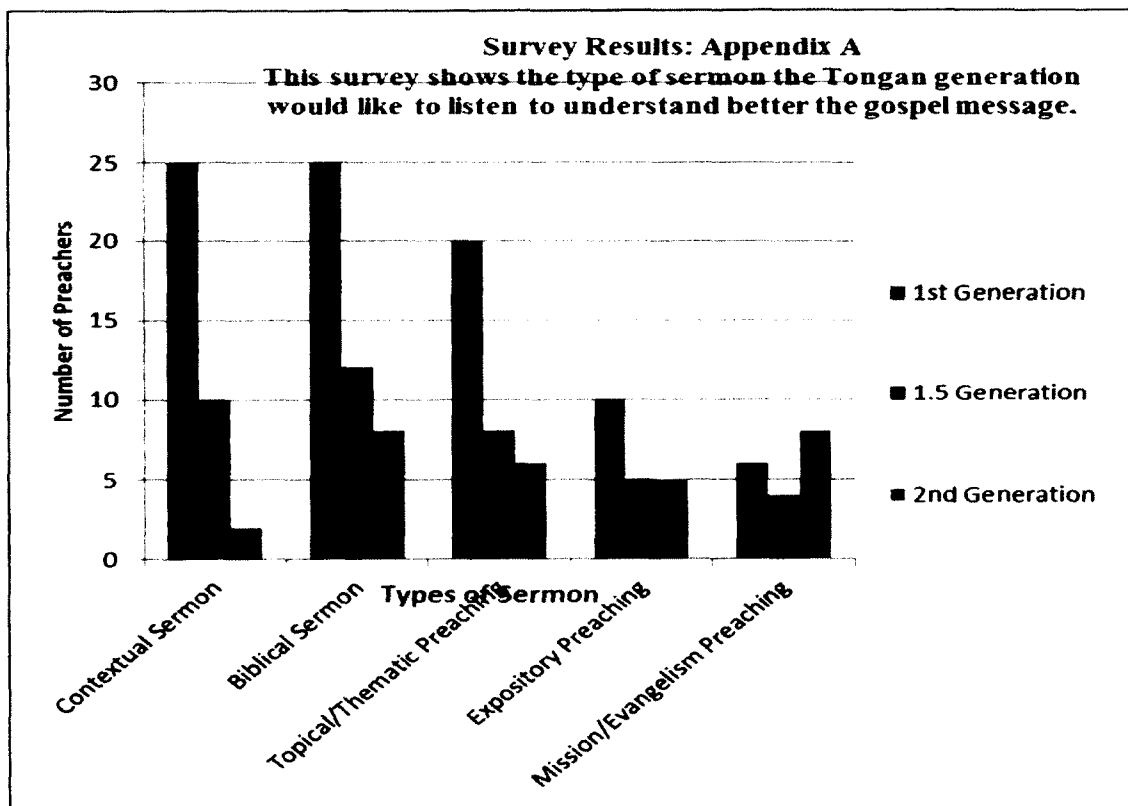
17. How long is a good sermon for the Tongan American congregation?

18. Any other comment or preference on how to preach the gospel in the Tongan American church?

THANK YOU FOR YOUR COOPERATION Survey Results

The members who responded to the survey were the representatives of the Tongan American congregation of the United Methodist Church who attended the California Pacific Annual Conference at the University of Redland in June 16, 2010. The purpose

of the survey is to find out if the contextualization of preaching the gospel is the effective way to communicate the gospel in the Tongan American congregation, and how much the preachers integrate the Tongan cultures in the sermon. There were 50 surveys distributed with 45 responses to the survey with the breakdown of the preachers and non-preachers who identify themselves in each category of the generation Tongan American. The graph below shows the different generations with the percentages of the type of sermon the Tongan American congregation like to listen that understand better the preaching of the gospel.



The survey was significant for the project because the respondents validated the need to contextualize the sermon because the majority of the people in the congregation are first generation Tongan Americans. There are 27 preachers with 15 who identify themselves as first generation, eight as 1.5 generation and four as 2nd generation Tongan

Americans. The 45 respondents attend the Tongan American congregation and Tongan language is spoken in preaching, worship, church gathering, celebration and programs. In fact, the 45 respondents shared that their church practices all the Tongan traditional activities in the church as part of their worship service, celebration, fellowship and church programs. The 2nd generation preacher and lay person shared that Children Sermon and Sunday school are taught in both Tongan and English language. Out of the 27 preachers, 90% of them understand the Tongan culture, and 100% speak and understand the Tongan language. Therefore, they all preached in Tongan. Despite of the small percentage of preachers that do not know much about the Tongan culture, the 27 preachers like to hear a sermon that integrates the Tongan culture. In fact, they recommended using all the aspects of Tongan culture asked in question #12 of the survey in the sermon. In addition, 30 responded to question #15 to #17 by saying that they like to hear a contextual sermon that helps them to understand the Bible in the Tongan context. The 15 preachers who are first generation Tongan responded to the survey saying that they used Tongan culture in their sermon and 80% of them prefer the Contextual, Biblical and Topical method of preaching while only 20% liked Expository and Evangelism preaching. There are 32 responses indicated the first and second generation Tongan American members worship together and listen to the same sermon. When asked what would be the most effective preaching style 100% of respondents wanted more of the contextual sermon in the Tongan context. 80% did not care about the length of the sermon as long as the sermon is easy to understand in the Tongan context.

In conclusion, the survey indicates that many Tongan American congregations consist of more than 80% of first generation Tongan Americans who understand the

Tongan culture, speak and understand the Tongan language and prefer preaching that is contextualized (Appendix A, question 15-17). However, the graph reflects that the young generation in the Tongan American congregations is more interested in mission and evangelistic preaching or sermons that invite them to make a decision in responding to the message with the help of the Holy Spirit.

SURVEY

APPENDIX B

Please answer Yes or No to the following questions to the best of your knowledge and return to the pastor for a group discussion. If you don't want to answer, please feel free to go on to the next question.

1. Did you understand today's message? Yes: _____ No: _____
2. Was the sermon appropriate to the context of the Sun Valley U.M.C.?
3. Were the stories and references to Tongan culture appropriate to the sermon?
4. Did the preacher explain the context and explain the meaning of the text clearly?
5. Did the preacher know the context of the listeners?
6. Did the preacher introduce the sermon well into the body and conclusion?
7. Were the hymns chosen for the service appropriate to the theme?
8. Was the preacher faithful to the text, context and preaching the gospel?
9. Any recommendations or suggestions?

THANK YOU VERY MUCH

Survey Results

This survey asked 10 preachers who heard the Sermon Number One in Chapter Four of this project that was preached by the author on Sunday November 24, 2012 in Sun Valley United Methodist. The survey was distributed to 10 preachers in the church

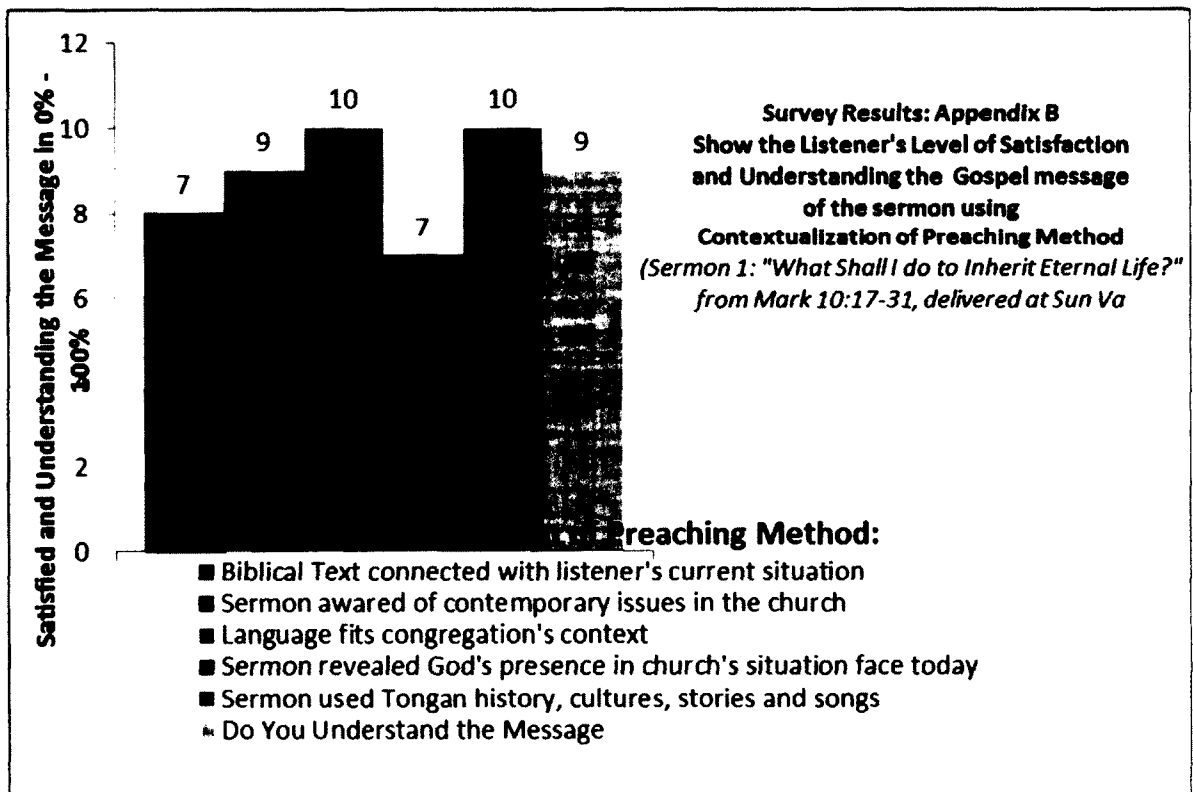
office for evaluation after the sermon preached on the same day. After the survey was completed, the preacher joined the respondents for a conversation and group discussion of the survey.

Based on the data collected from the survey above, 80% indicated that they understood the message of the contextual sermon by using the Tongan context, 90% biblical and 100% when sermon use the language that fits the listener's context. Most of the preachers (80%) stated that the sermon was appropriate to the context of the Sun Valley UMC while 20% raised questions about the youth and children who do not relate to the Tongan language or culture. In fact, 90% agreed that the contextualization of preaching the sermon is the effective method to use in preaching in the Tongan American churches for better understanding.

The 10 preachers who took who took the survey say that the Tongan cultures and stories used are appropriate to the biblical text and the message. In our group discussion, 70% of the preachers preferred to start their sermons with the listener's context (62%) and less than 40% prefer to start the sermon with the text. About 80% prefer to hear a sermon that included Tongan stories, values, cultures, hymns and songs that are relevant to the listener's context as first generation Tongan Americans. Many of the listeners like sermons that engage the listeners in the beginning of the sermon by addressing issues or concerns. The 10 preachers who took the survey and who listened to the sermon preached in Sun Valley United Methodist Church believe that contextual preaching is an effective way to help them understand the gospel message.

There are some suggestions from the preachers in our group discussions. One preacher suggests the preacher to share some of the main points of the contextual sermon

in English while preaching so the youth and 2nd generation can also understand the message in their context. The discussion was also share that the listeners like when the sermons begin with the story of the listeners' context before going into the biblical text. There were two preachers who like to start the sermon with asking questions or addressing issues or concerns to the listeners. Therefore, I appreciated the result of this survey that show how the Tongan American congregation's preachers are taking their role of preaching the gospel seriously to help the congregation understand the Bible relevance and connect with the listener's context.



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